

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

Funders and Regulators

Name of Institution	Vivensa Foundation (previously The Dunhill Medical Trust)
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Web address of annual report	https://vivensafoundation.org.uk/support-and-resources/
Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	https://vivensafoundation.org.uk/support-and-resources/
Contact for questions/concerns on researcher career development	grants@vivensafoundation.org.uk
Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat (refer to <u>Researcher Development Concordat Reporting Guidance</u>)	5 th February 2026

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 Vivensa Foundation (previously The Dunhill Medical Trust) is an independently endowed charitable funder (registered charity no. 1140372), focused on supporting the remarkable research and radical social change needed for people in the UK to age well. Of primary relevance to the Concordat, most of our grant-giving activities are focused on funding academic and clinical research into the underpinning mechanisms of ageing, the management / treatment of ageing-related conditions, and improving the health and wellbeing of older people.

We are committed to promoting a dynamic, diverse, and inclusive research system. As a funder, we also expect our awardees and their affiliated organisations to uphold similar values. In particular, equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and capacity building / career development remain principles underpinning all the work we support. In April 2025 we changed our name to coincide with the publication of our new 2025-2030 Strategic Framework, which places additional emphasis on the principles / values which underpin everything we do.

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. In particular, we provide targeted support for early- and mid-career researchers to prevent them from being lost to the field (this support is expanded upon later in the report).

As a funder we promote the inclusion of early- and mid-career researchers as named co-applicants on grant applications and have introduced new policies / initiatives in the last year (further detail below) to further address job security / precarity.

In addition, at the application stage applicants are asked to explain how the proposed research / team / involved organisations align with the Foundation's principles / values 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).

These responses form a key element of the assessment of applications, and this is always made clear in our call documentation. And, as part of the progress and end-of-grant updates completed during the lifetime of the grant, grant-holders are asked to reflect on their progress against their plans with regard to these principles and any learning that has arisen from this.

We continue to try and take a supportive and person-centred approach to our engagement with our grant-holders, with the aim of making a meaningful contribution to research culture (particularly for those we support directly). This [case study](#) – part of a series published following the launch of our new name – provides an overview of our approach to career development and features a number of those we support.

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

We continue to offer initiatives through the [Vivensa Academy](#) which promote and contribute to a positive research culture, namely the Academy Excellence Awards (more detail on which is provided in the next section). Whilst it remains too early to fully evaluate the tangible impact of the awards on award-holders / their networks, our spotlight articles on [Professor Vicki Goodwin](#) and [Dr Toby Ellmers](#) (last year’s winners of the Senior Leader and Rising Star awards) highlight how their approaches and intended uses for the award funds align with the aims of the Concordat.

An outstanding aspect of our action plan 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 supportive environment.

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

Employment

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

- We have introduced a scheme which provides opportunities for undergraduate students, from any discipline, to engage in ageing-related research (this is outlined in more detail in the next section). This is the first time we have specifically targeted our support towards undergraduate students. As part of our evaluation of this scheme, we intend to capture data on whether students recruited through the scheme continue / intend to continue to pursue ageing-related research following their degree.
- Following a successful pilot in 2024, we have since run a fully open round of our Early Career Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme (also outlined in more detail in the next section).
- We intend to run further rounds of our Multiple PhD Studentship (targeted at the PhD-level) and Proleptic Postdoctoral Fellowship (targeted at mid-career researchers with the potential to become future leaders) schemes in future years.

An ongoing piece of work is the implementation of our new post-award reporting framework / processes. Following the end of our use of Researchfish, our new end-of-grant review processes are intended to track the next destinations / career progression of those funded through our grants – with a mid- / long-term measure of success being a high proportion remaining in ageing-related fields.

Despite some delays, we still plan to review / update our Terms and Conditions for Research Grants, with one area of potential focus being strengthening our stance on / support for researchers (particularly students) who need to take parental and/or sick leave.

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.

Organising events / training / other opportunities to support researchers’ professional development remains a focus of ours, and the following section outlines our activities in this regard during 2025. As co-convenor of the [UK Ageing Research Funders’ Forum](#)

(UKARFF) we continue to consider how we can use the collective membership of the network to further support this pillar of the Concordat.

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

In September 2025 we launched the third round of our Academy Excellence Awards, which aim to recognise and celebrate those who have demonstrated excellence in ageing-related research and a meaningful contribution to our key principles, with awardees receiving £120k to spend flexibly on research-related activities. In particular, this year, for the first time, we included a “Team Achievement” category, which seeks to celebrate those working collaboratively and inclusively in multidisciplinary and/or multi-professional teams – with a focus on those with team members from diverse backgrounds / career stages and who’ve contributed to a positive working culture.

Employment

We remain an accredited Living Wage Funder, with applicants to our research funding calls being asked to confirm whether all posts fully / partly funded through the grant will be paid at least the Real Living Wage – since accreditation, this has been the case for 100% of grants supported through our research funding calls.

Over the last 12 months we have become increasingly aware of the difficult financial situation within UK higher education institutions, and the impact of this on the financial sustainability of charity-funded research. To help address this, in June 2025 our Board of Trustees (with the support of our Research Grants Committee) approved a change to our policy on eligible costs for research organisations, to enable all applicants – including those with permanent contracts – to include their Directly Allocated salary costs (if fully justified) in the budget for their application. The aim here is to contribute to applicants’ job security, many of whom (including those on permanent contracts) it was noted are often required to secure grants which contribute to their salaries. This change was first introduced for our recent call on ‘Prevention in Underserved Communities’ and will continue to be rolled-out to future calls where relevant.

Following a successful pilot in 2024, in 2025 we ran the first fully open round of our Early Career Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme. This is targeted at early career researchers (ECRs) with up to three years’ postdoctoral research experience – a career stage that, in

consultation with our Research Grants Committee, has been identified as being in particular need of support. Interest in the first round was high, suggesting this is indeed an area of need.

Professional Development of Researchers

In May 2025, we launched the first round of our Joint Undergraduate Research Placement scheme with the British Geriatrics Society, which aims to increase opportunities for undergraduate students, from any discipline, to engage in ageing-related research by undertaking a short research placement paid at the Real Living Wage. As part of the assessment process, priority was placed on proposals which could build capacity within underserved locations, centres, disciplines and/or student demographics. The scheme was also framed as a good opportunity for early- / mid-career researchers to gain valuable experience of student supervision.

We continue to facilitate events / training to support researchers' professional development. In February 2025 we co-organised the first UK Ageing Research Funders' Forum (UKARFF) Early Career Researcher (ECR) event – bringing together ECRs from across UKARFF's member organisations – and in November 2025 we hosted our own ECR event, which included a panel discussion centred around putting our principles into practice (including a panellist who discussed research culture and mentorship). Separately, throughout the year we have offered a number of training sessions aligned with the Concordat's aims via the Vivensa Academy – e.g. masterclasses on “how to mentor effectively in academia” and “how to build a supportive network”.

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 mentioned above, we are very much aware of the financial pressures within the UK university sector and have already introduced new policies to try and improve the financial sustainability of the research we fund (and the job security of those funded through our grants). However, we are aware that this situation may have an impact on the demand for some of our schemes, particularly those which require co-funding from the host organisation. For this reason, our current thinking is that future rounds of our Multiple PhD Studentship scheme will not mandate a financial contribution from the host institution. We are aware that these changes will, in many cases, increase the amount of funding that applicants request from us and thus may reduce the number of individual grants we can fund – however, we feel that this is outweighed by the benefits of ensuring that the work we do support is funded in a more sustainable manner. As we continue to rollout our updated policy on eligible costs – particularly allowing justified Directly Allocated costs – we

aim to collect data on the proportion of the full economic cost (fEC) that is being covered by our funding, to evaluate the impact of this.

As shown in our updated action plan (and mentioned in previous sections), there remain some outstanding actions related to the review / update of our research Terms and Conditions and the final aspects of our new post-award framework, which we hope to complete over the coming 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:

- To complete the outstanding actions regarding the implementation of our new post-award reporting framework / processes - namely, implementing our mechanism to independently capture the experiences of those employed on our grants.
- To complete a review / update of the relevant aspects of our Terms and Conditions for research grants.
- To continue to rollout our updated policy on eligible costs for research organisations – allowing applicants to apply for justified Directly Allocated costs (including salary costs) – to relevant funding calls.

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 Vivensa Foundation's Director of Research and Chief Executive, prior to review / approval from our Research Grants Committee.

Signature on behalf of governing body / equivalent authority:



Contact for queries: grants@vivensafoundation.org.uk

This annual report will be analysed by the 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 via the email address listed on the RDC website: www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk.