

**Concordats and
Agreements: their role
in supporting effective
cultures and working
environments as part of
the research landscape**

Research undertaken by Basis Social on behalf of UUK, UKRI and Wellcome



Project context, research approach and overarching findings

Research background, aims and objectives

Concordats and agreements are a significant part of the landscape of frameworks and good practices which shape research. They cover a range of areas and have been developed in response to different challenges and opportunities in the researcher environment over the past two decades. These initiatives are intended to help the research community to achieve outcomes which contribute to ‘research culture’, however their adoption is inconsistent and there has been no overall assessment of their collective impact on research conditions in the UK.

Universities UK (UUK), UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and Wellcome commissioned Basis Social to gather insights on the **adoption and impact of 12 initiatives** currently in place in the research sector (see right).

This research complements the UK Government’s wider review of research bureaucracy.

Research conduct and working practices					
Concordat to Support Research Integrity	Open research data	Concordat for the Advancement of Knowledge Exchange in Higher Education	Engaging the Public with Research	Openness on animal research	Safeguarding in International Development Research
Staff development		Assessment and evaluation		Equality, diversity and inclusion	
Career Development of Researchers	Technician Commitment	San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment	Leiden Manifesto	Athena Swan Charter	Race Equality Charter

Research approach

1

Scoping phase (May - June 2021)

- Interviews with representatives involved in the development of each of the initiatives (the ‘initiative owners’)
- Analysis of documentation related to initiatives

2

Survey phase (July - August 2021)

- A survey of those in ‘strategic influencer’ and ‘operational delivery’ roles* to assess the current take-up and trends in adopting the initiatives, as well as assessing the perceived impact of the initiatives on research culture and the working environment
- A total of 510 respondents took part in the survey across 81 organisations

* Defined as individuals involved in the oversight or implementation of initiatives in HEIs/HEPs and eligible research institutes

3

Case study phase (July - September 2021)

- Interviews involving 27 members of staff across seven organisations, complemented by analysis of organisational documentation relating to the culture and practice of research
- The sample included six HEIs/HEPs and one independent research organisation. Within each organisation, interviews were undertaken with 3-5 staff representing a mixture of strategic, managerial, administrative and researcher roles

Key findings

1. Overall, survey respondents reported that there was a net positive impact from initiatives on research culture and the working environment, and their benefits were seen to outweigh their administrative burden.
2. Initiatives were perceived as having a number of benefits:
 - focusing the attention of senior leaders on significant issues of relevance to the research sector;
 - informing organisational strategy and policies to support high-quality research;
 - providing good practice and shared learning;
 - helping to break down silos and encourage collaboration; and
 - providing a mandate for action on important issues.
3. Initiatives were viewed as influential on research culture and working environment, but less so than other factors including peers, leaders, organisational strategy and funders.

Key findings

3. The level of perceived impact of initiatives differed across research organisations. Just under half of staff responding to the survey were either unsure of the impact or agreed the initiatives have had only a ‘limited impact’ on research culture and the working environment.
4. There was seen to be the need to address two main issues to improve the impact of initiatives from the perspective of those interviewed in the case studies:
 - while there is no obvious overlap between initiatives in terms of their aims, they do have a range of administrative requirements which, collectively, can place significant burden on organisations; and
 - having greater clarity on what success looks like, and how to measure the outcomes and impacts resulting from initiatives – through common standards and benchmarks – could help promote practices that improve research culture.
5. There was also a view, identified in the case study interviews, on the need to simplify and integrate initiatives at a collective level. This would reduce administrative burden by eliminating parallel processes and by providing a unified framework to aid adoption.



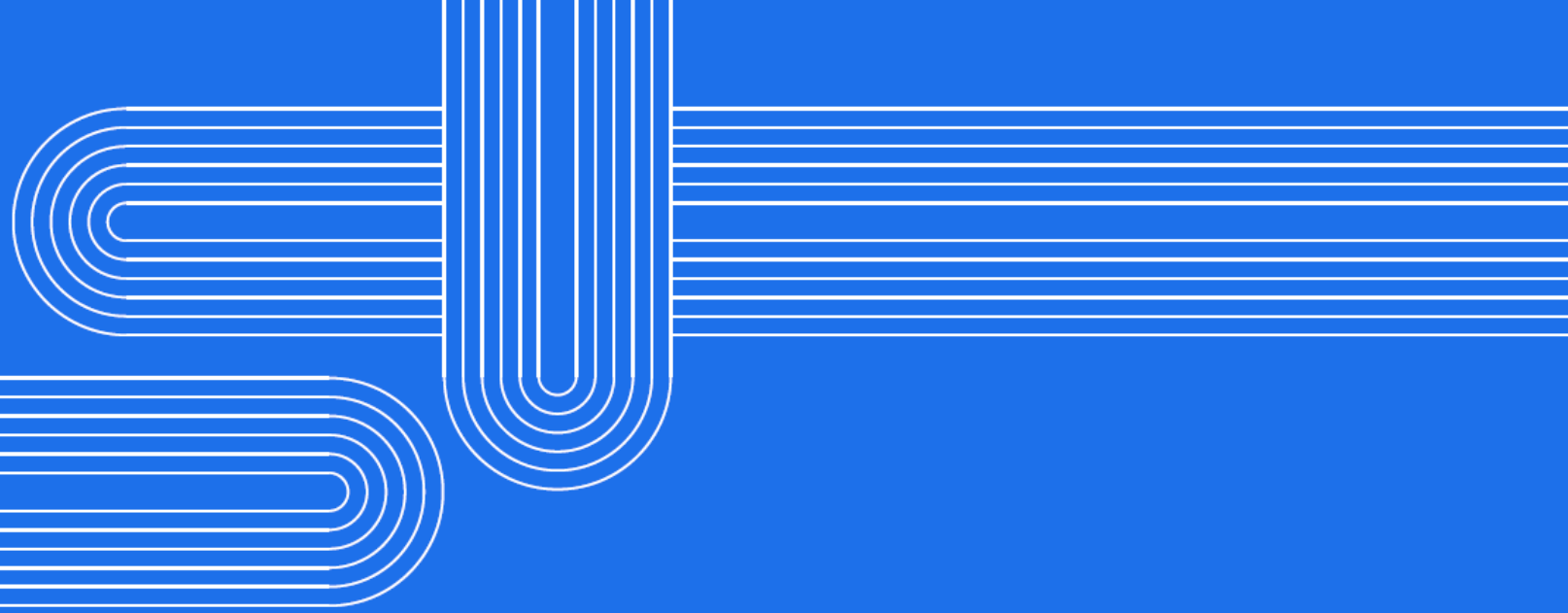
Key findings of relevance to strategic influencers and those involved in the operational delivery of initiatives

Key observations and headline findings

1. 78% of survey respondents indicated that there had been a focus on improving research culture and/or the environment in the past two years; and 50% felt that both research culture and the working environment had improved during this period.
2. 'People' were seen to be the key influence on driving a positive research culture and working environment, with the following groups seen as influential: the research community (91%), research team leaders (90%), other colleagues (86%) and the Vice Chancellor or other leaders (81%). Other key influences included organisational strategy (86%), funders (86%) and the REF (77%). 83% of survey respondents felt the initiatives were influential.
3. Initiatives were seen to have a net positive impact on research culture and the working environment, and their benefits were seen to outweigh their administrative burden. Three quarters (73%) of survey respondents agreed initiatives had benefits in driving better research practice and outcomes, of which 30% reported only weak agreement.
4. Just under half of those responsible for the strategic integration and implementation of initiatives were either unsure of the impact or agreed they have had a limited impact on research culture (42%) and the research environment. The majority of respondents (53%) also highlighted the challenge in measuring the impact of initiatives on driving a positive working environment.

Key observations and headline findings

5. Where benefits were identified these related to: focusing the attention of senior leaders on significant issues; informing organisational strategy and policies; providing good practice and shared learning; encouraging collaboration; and providing a mandate for action on important issues.
6. Factors supporting the implementation of initiatives identified through interviews included:
 - senior leaders with a remit to manage and support research;
 - core funding to put toward roles that support the coordination and implementation of initiatives;
 - administrative support for research processes which relate to initiative implementation; and
 - well-established networks where researchers can share ideas and collaborate across shared interest areas.
7. Case study interviewees suggest the positive influence of initiatives could be improved by:
 - simplifying and integrating initiatives at a collective level which would reduce administrative burden by eliminating parallel processes and by providing a unified framework to aid adoption; and
 - having greater clarity on what success looks like, and how to measure the outcomes and impacts resulting from initiatives – through common standards and benchmarks.



Key findings of relevance to researchers

Key observations and headline findings

1. Over three quarters (78%) of survey respondents indicated that there had been a focus on improving research culture and/or the environment in the past two years; and 50% felt that both research culture and the working environment had improved during this period.
2. The culture around research was seen to incentivise the 'right behaviours' by 60% of survey respondents, while just over half felt it supported the delivery of good research (54%) and the working environment promoted a good work life balance (52%).
3. 'People' were seen to be the key influence on driving a positive research culture and working environment, with the following groups seen as influential: the research community (91%), research team leaders (90%), other colleagues (86%) and the Vice Chancellor or other leaders (81%). Other key influences included organisational strategy (86%), funders (86%) and the REF (77%). 83% of survey respondents felt the initiatives were influential.
4. Initiatives were seen to have a net positive impact on research culture and the working environment, and their benefits were seen to outweigh their administrative burden. 73% of survey respondents agreed initiatives had benefits in driving better research practice and outcomes.

Key observations and headline findings

5. The direct awareness of initiatives by research staff was felt to be very low in the case study interviews, largely because initiatives were seen to have been folded into other organisational policies and processes which were already one step removed from their day-to-day roles.
6. Just under half of those responsible for the strategic integration and implementation of initiatives were either unsure of the impact of initiatives or agreed they have had a limited impact on research culture (42%) and the research environment.
7. Where benefits were identified these related to: focusing the attention of senior leaders on significant issues; informing organisational strategy and policies; providing good practice and shared learning; encouraging collaboration; and providing a mandate for action on important issues.
8. Factors supporting the implementation of initiatives identified through interviews included:
 - senior leaders with a remit to manage and support research;
 - core funding to put toward roles that support the coordination and implementation of initiatives;
 - administrative support for research processes which relate to initiative implementation; and
 - well-established networks where researchers can share ideas and collaborate across shared interest areas.



Key findings of relevance to initiative owners

Key observations and headline findings

1. Over four in five (83%) of survey respondents felt initiatives were influential in driving a positive research culture and working environment.
2. Initiatives were seen to have a net positive impact on research culture and the working environment, and their benefits were seen to outweigh their administrative burden. 73% of survey respondents agreed initiatives had benefits in driving better research practice and outcomes. However, just under half of those responsible for the strategic integration and implementation of initiatives were either unsure of the impact of initiatives or agreed they have had a limited impact on research culture (42%) and the research environment.
3. Benefits associated with initiatives collectively included: focusing the attention of senior leaders on significant issues; informing organisational strategy and policies; providing good practice and shared learning; encouraging collaboration; and providing a mandate for action on important issues.
4. Case study interviewees suggest the positive influence of initiatives could be further improved by:
 - simplifying and integrating initiatives at a collective level which would reduce administrative burden by eliminating parallel processes and by providing a unified framework to aid adoption; and
 - having greater clarity on what success looks like, and how to measure the outcomes and impacts resulting from initiatives – through common standards and benchmarks.

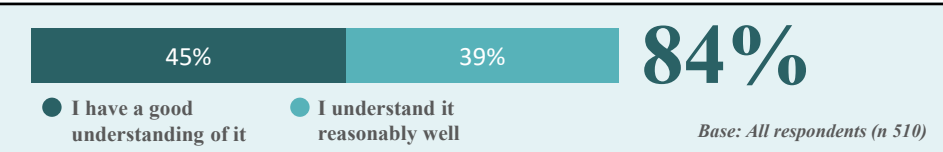


Summaries of individual initiatives*

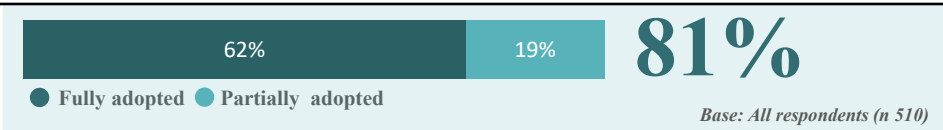
* Note that survey respondents were each asked detailed questions about no more than 3 initiatives to minimise burden on those participating. Individual summaries are only available here for those initiatives where we had a minimum base size of 60 responding to each question. Summaries for The Leiden Manifesto on Research Metrics and the UKCDR Guidance on Safeguarding in International Development Research are not included here due to small base sizes of those responding to the survey.

Athena Swan Charter

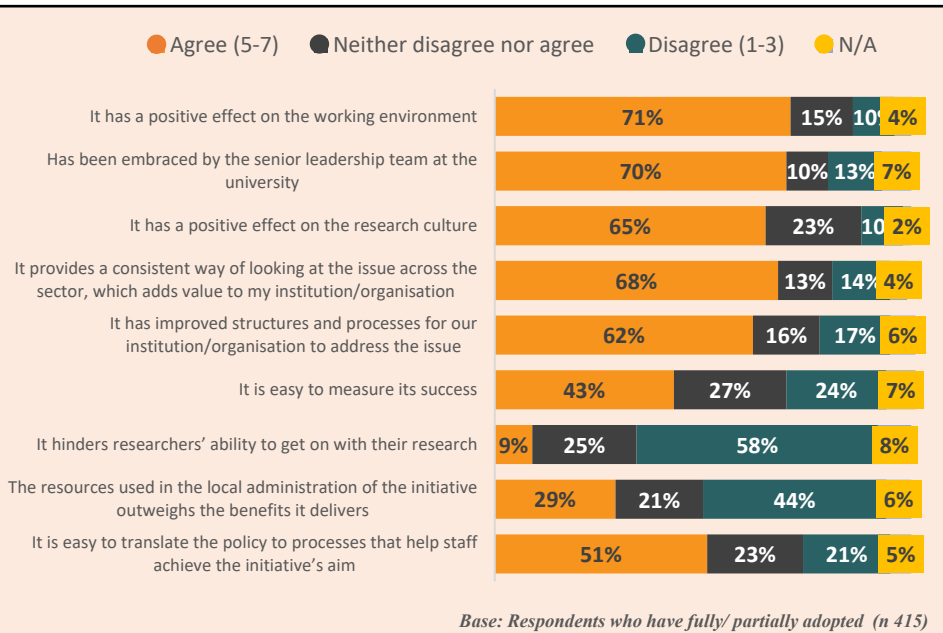
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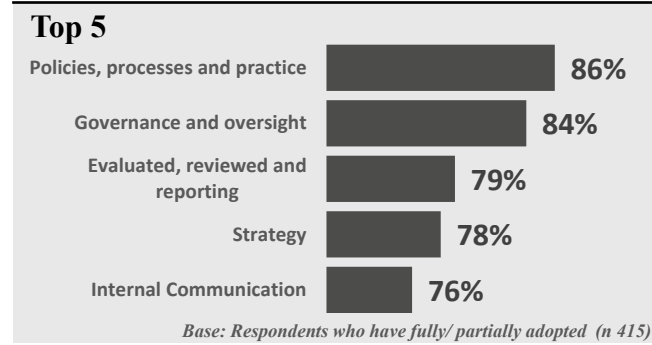
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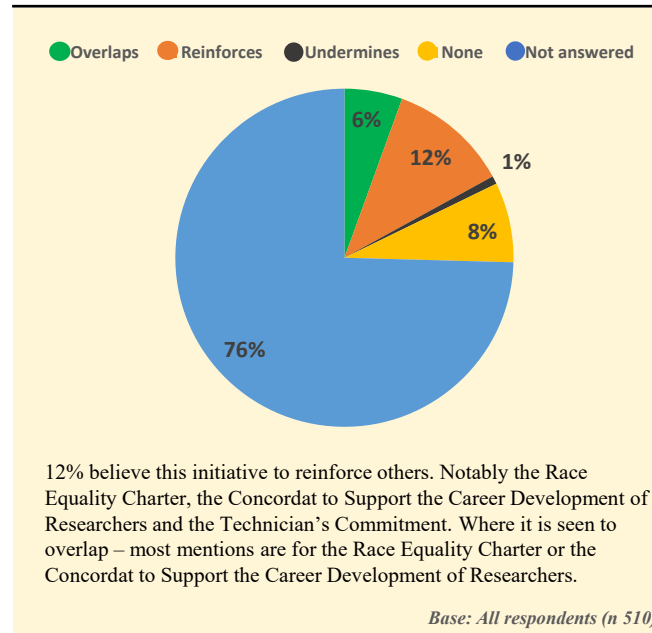
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Implementation



Relationship to others



Key benefits

“ Provided a recognised structure to investigate the issues. Approach was highly tailored to the issues identified in the organisation. The organisational benefits of being recognised as an Athena Swan award holder was invaluable in justifying challenging conversations and setting targets internally. [Strategic influencer, Research Institute](#) ”

“ At the very least they provide a framework that everyone can ... A common criticism is that these can become a "tick box" exercise that does not improve culture. Athena Swan is a good example of this. ... we use Juno rather than Athena Swan, perhaps for this reason. [Strategic influencer, Research Institute](#) ”

“ They provide an enlightening resource & framework for how things could be done. Plus, a 'formal' backing for staff & students to speak up & to challenge the status quo on various issues (who otherwise may not have had the confidence to speak up or persist). However, they risk becoming meaningless 'tick box' exercises if not implemented with authenticity. For example, an Athena Swan award given to a department where women were leaving in droves due a management culture that still viewed a women's role as in the home. [Strategic influencer, HEI/HEP](#) ”

Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research

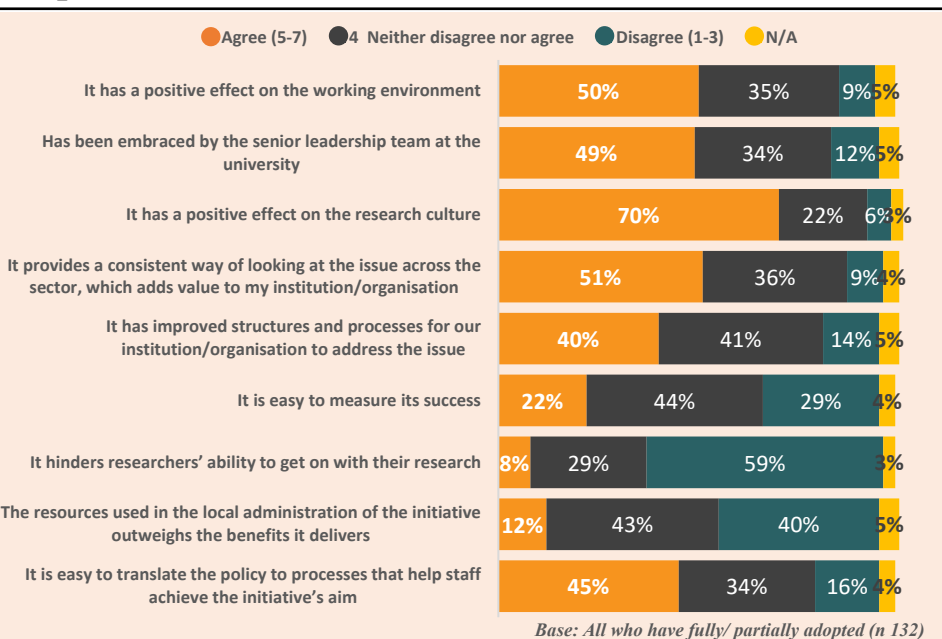
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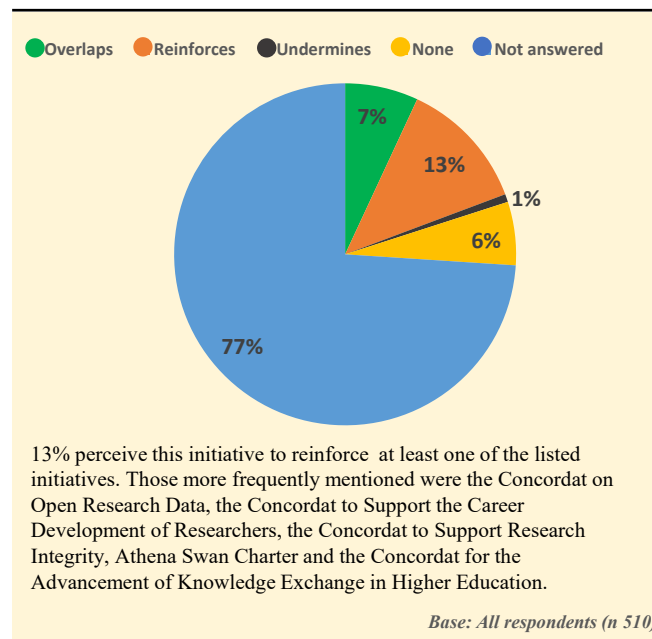
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Implementation



Relationship to others



Key benefits



Its clear that initiatives that propose and support EDI broadly, and that lead to open engagement with the public, foster transparency, reduce bullying, etc are all excellent measures moving forwards. In this feedback I have noted that although I am aware of many concordats, I am not very aware whether my institution has adopted them, and this is because we have so much data in HE, inc emails and other documents to keep on top off, I haven't been able to keep up to date with these policies.

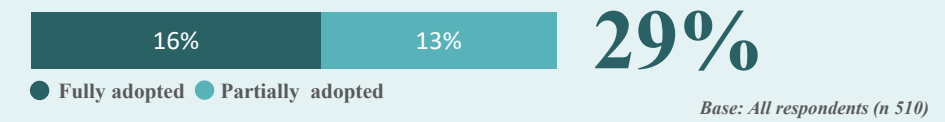
That doesn't mean I am not interested, rather I trust my institution (hope) that they will have followed through on the concordat intentions. Secondly I am not a policy maker, or at a management level whereby I would be involved in the adoption of these policies which is another reason. As such its important I think in this survey to not assume that lack of knowledge in the area of policy adoption, equates to a lack of interest. It's quite possible to be an active senior researcher and not know the detail, but be supporting many of the aims on the ground. [Operational delivery, HEI/HEP](#)

Concordat for the Advancement of Knowledge Exchange in HE

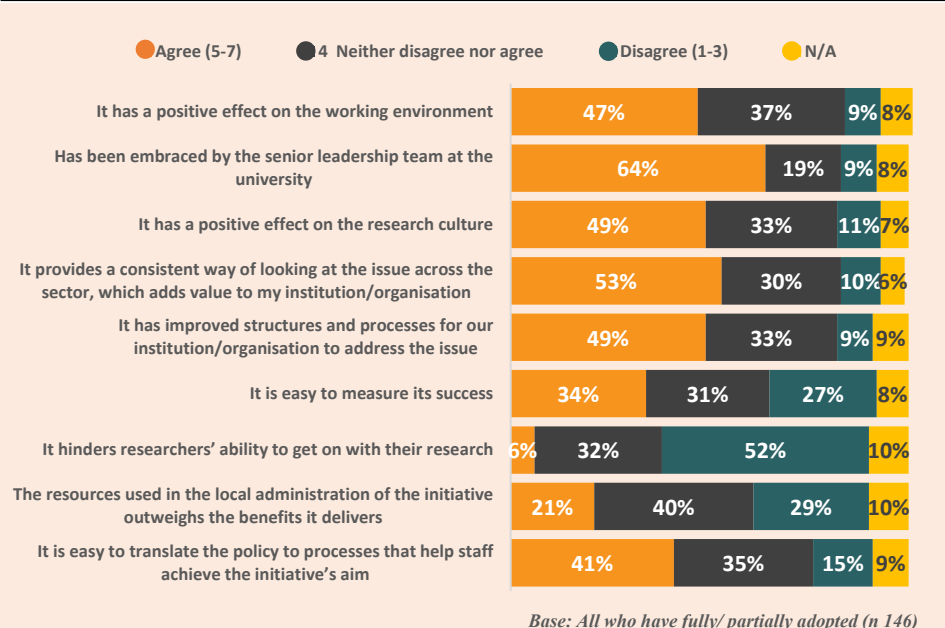
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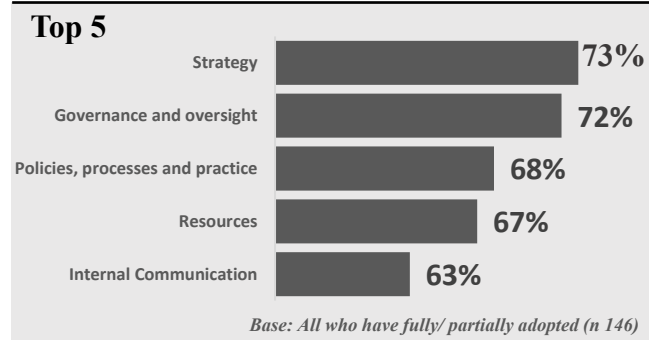
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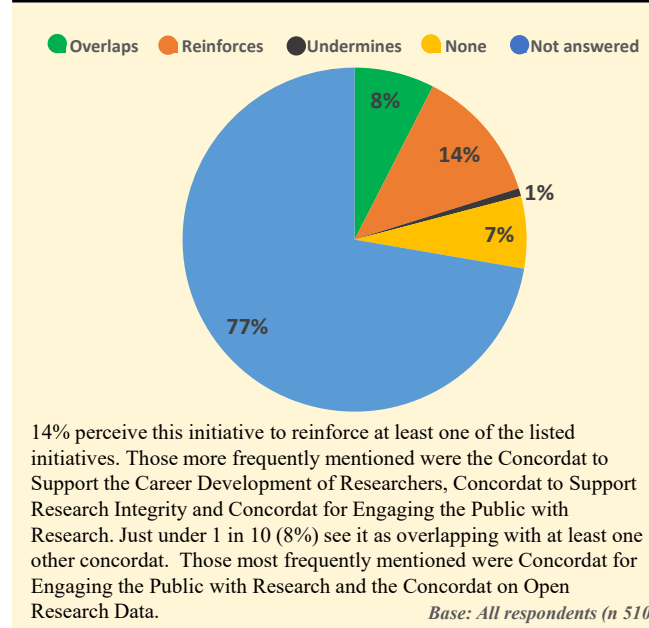
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Implementation



Relationship to others



Key benefits

“ These initiatives seek to establish and promote the kind of behaviours which engender open, transparent, reproducible, ethical, justifiable research practice and outcomes. They enable those considering a research career to see pathways into, through and out of it, having a positive influence and making lasting change for society along the way. Anything which enables research to be more open to scrutiny, so anyone can begin a dialogue with it, is of benefit to research practice and outcomes as a whole. It is the only way researchers can fight the spread of misinformation and bring the value of nuanced thinking and evidence-based decision making back to our social, economic and political lives. [Strategic influencer, HEI/HEP](#) ”

Concordat on Open Research Data

Awareness



Adoption



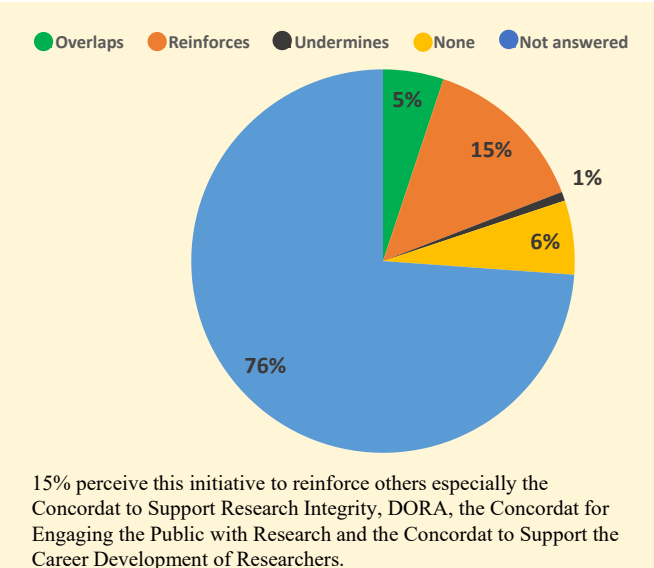
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Implementation



Relationship to others



Key benefits

“ Open research data and the building of resources within the institutes have definitely benefitted our group. accessibility to data and sharing of data, as well as collaborative development of new resources has directly impacted our research. Knowledge transfer initiatives have received a major boost and have expanded within our institute in the last 2 years, bringing more opportunities to collaborate with industries for our group and, for those interested, to consider career development opportunities. [Researcher](#), [Research Institute](#) ”

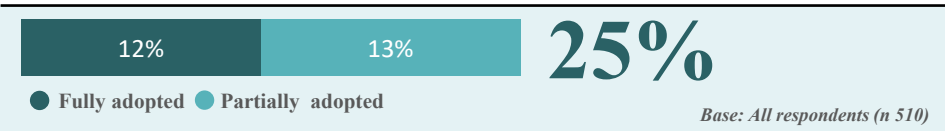
“ It has an outlined what needs to be done at different stakeholder levels within key areas across research. However, there seems to be no issue if some of them aren't met at a Uni level. For instance, for Open Research Data there is limited engagement because why should senior management care about it? [Operational delivery](#), [HEI/HEP](#) ”

Concordat on Openness on Animal Research

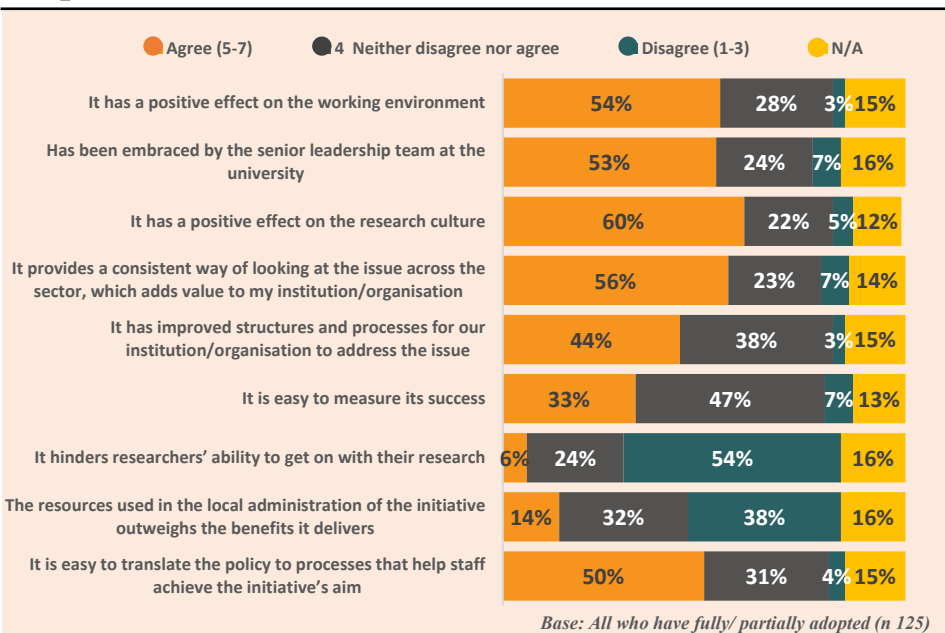
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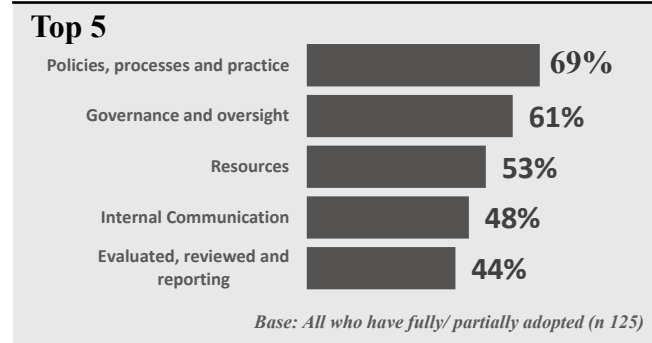
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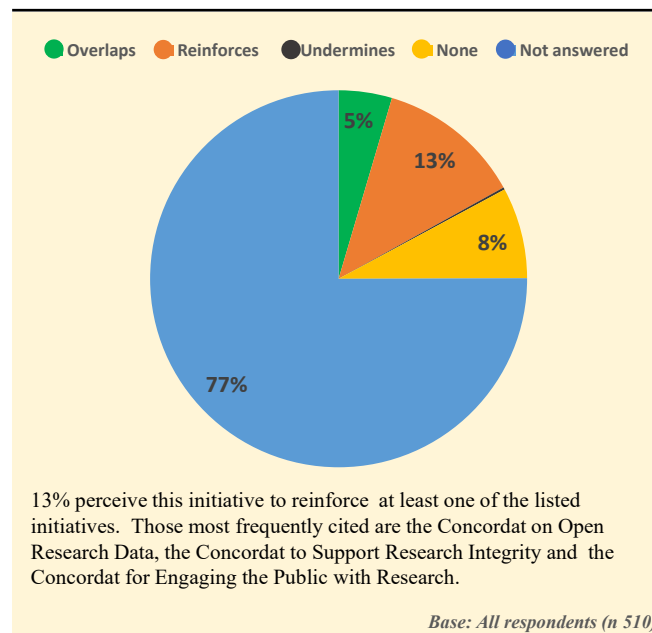
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Implementation



Relationship to others



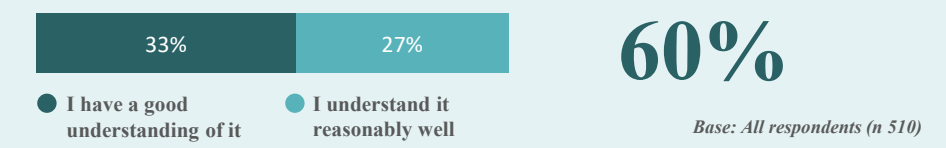
Key benefits

Specifically regarding openness in animal research - transparency and public scrutiny drives better research practice. When justifying their work to a lay audience, researchers have to think more carefully about it. **Operational delivery, HEI/HEP**

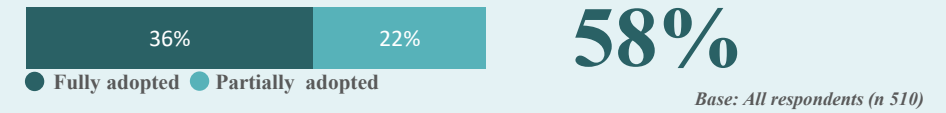
I am most familiar with the Concordat on Openness on Animal Research. It has been a useful lever in getting Senior Management to take concerns about openness seriously. **Strategic influencer, HEI/HEP**

Concordat to Support Research Integrity

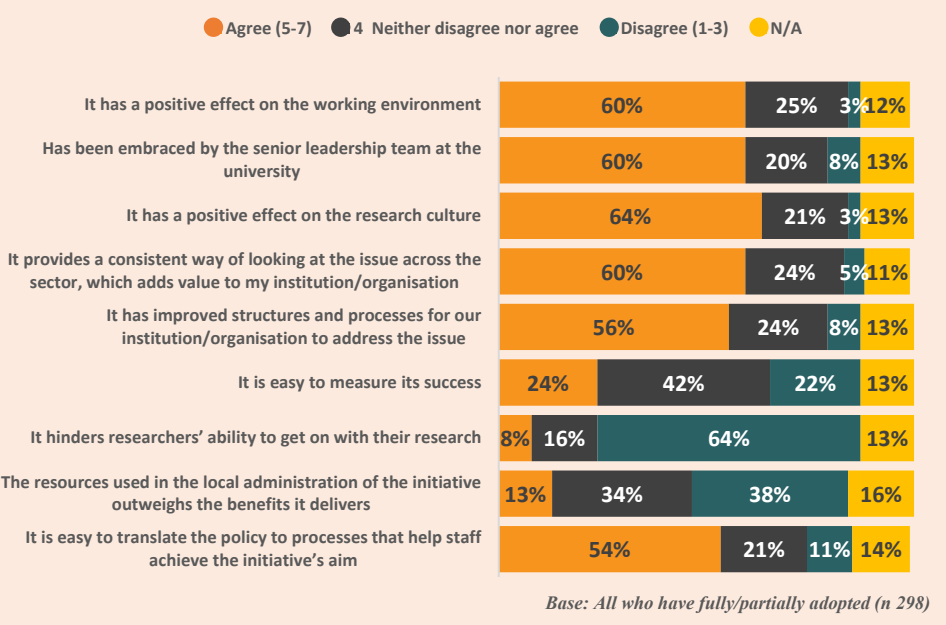
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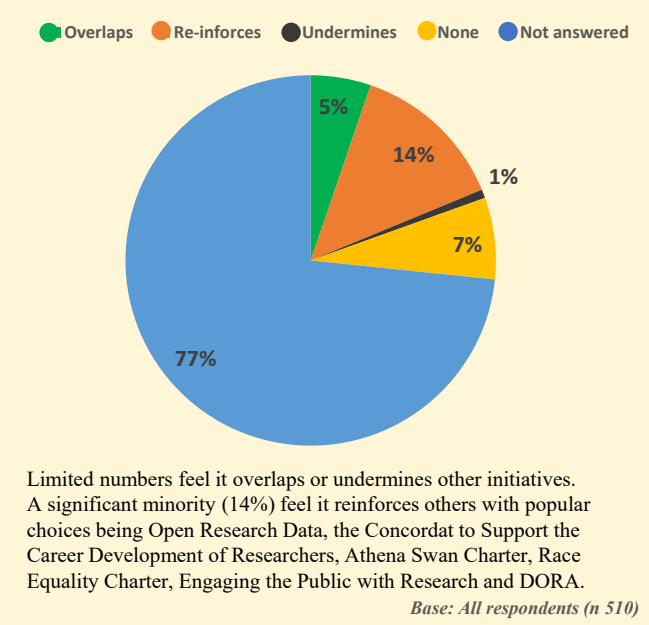
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Implementation



Relationship to others



Key benefits

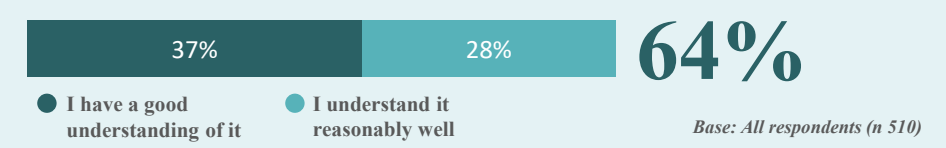
“ The Researcher Development and Research Integrity Concordats, for example, have driven more effective, policy-based decisions and support for our wider research community, based on national standards that have underpinned and energised institutional commitments. [Strategic influencer, HEI/HEP](#) ”

“ The support measures that are put in place are a clear benefit. Equally, it allows research/academic staff to feel part of a community of practice in relation to research practice and outcomes. It also allows for some consistency and benchmarking which is important to see how well an institution is performing in these areas. And finally, having a core set of values in relation to research integrity, open access, allows for easy communication to researchers. [Strategic influencer and Operational delivery, HEI/HEP](#) ”

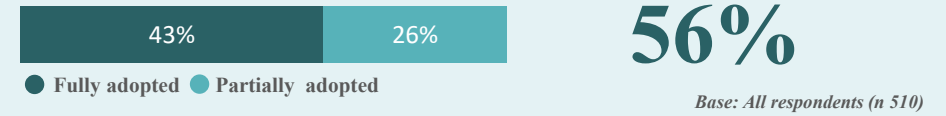
“ The concordat for research integrity is very valuable as it makes ethical codes mandatory and ensures high standards of integrity across the whole institution. There are too many other concordats that create bureaucratic processes and are not so easy to implement. We need research integrity and cultures of fairness and openness and the Integrity Concordat on us own is sufficient to ensure that this is in place and that research misconduct is dealt with. [Strategic influencer, HEI/HEP](#) ”

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

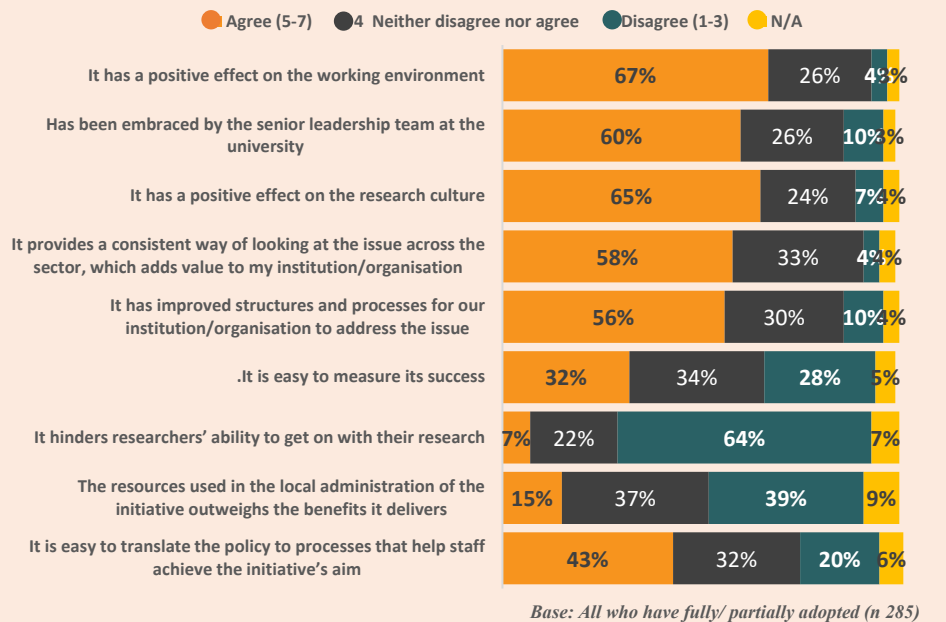
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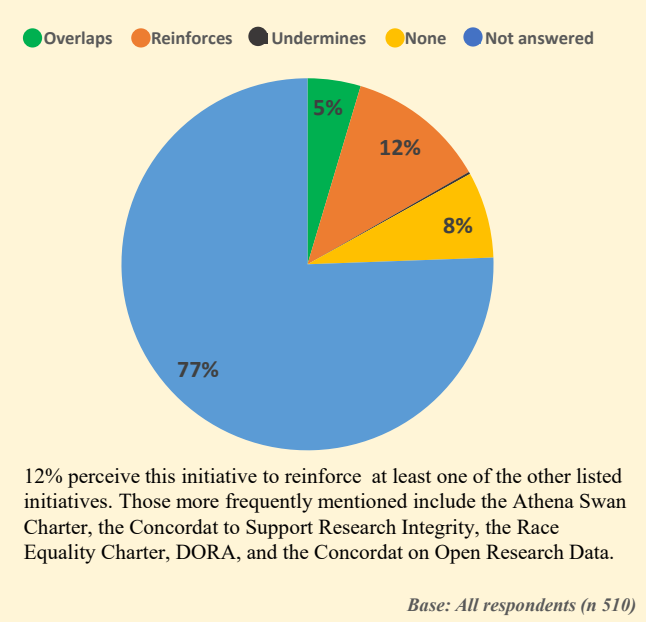
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Implementation



Relationship to others



Key benefits

“ Research careers are perceived as being stressful, competitive and difficult to achieve a reasonable work-life balance. Unless we address these we will drive talent out of the research sector. All efforts to address a positive research culture are therefore to be valued and are important for the vitality of the sector. [Strategic influencer, HEI/HEP](#) ”

“ They provide a consistent and transparent framework for researchers to conduct their research with integrity and in accordance with external requirements. To this end researchers not only understand their obligations but feel supported in the progression of their academic careers. The nature of the initiatives to support researchers at all career stages thereby ensures they remain focussed. [Operational Delivery, HEI/HEP](#) ”

Race Equality Charter

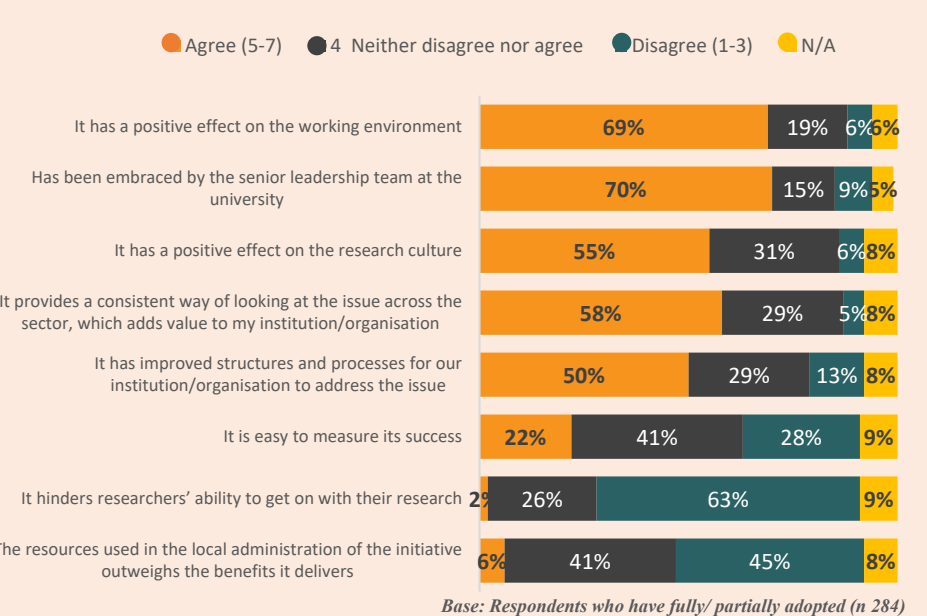
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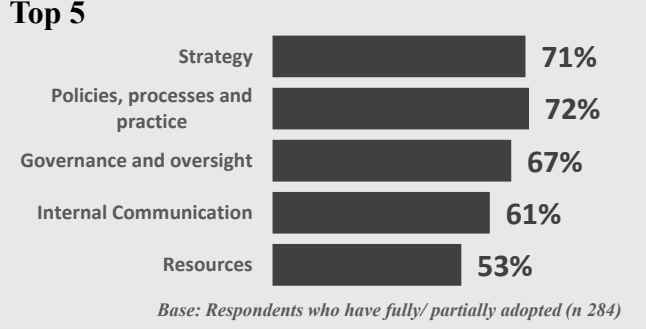
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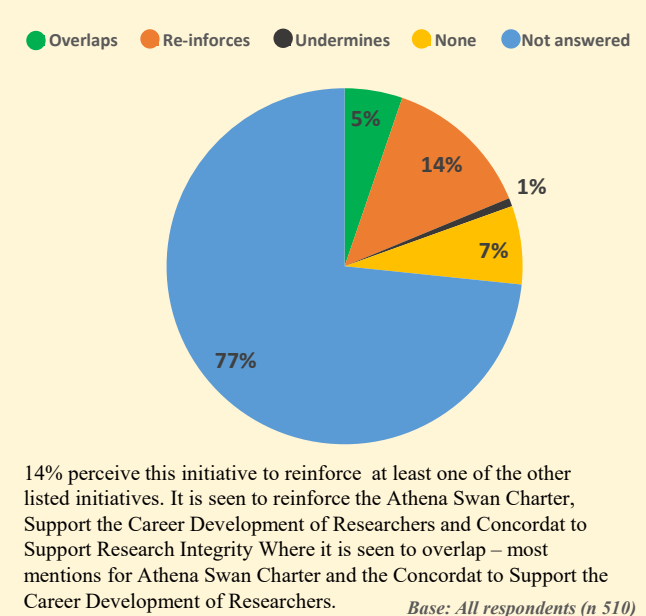
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Implementation



Relationship to others

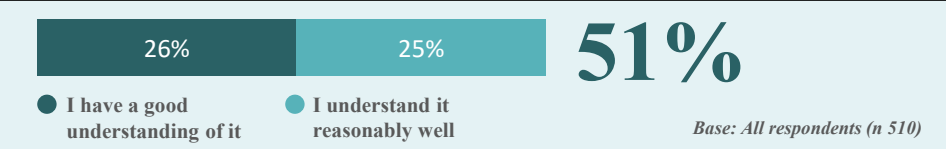


Key benefits

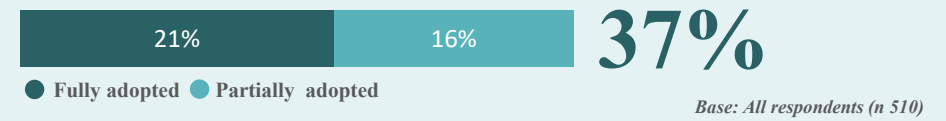
“...the initiatives help professional services conduct evaluations of the support provided in these different areas as a starting point. This is a good outcome because without external pressure a lot of issues would never be considered by universities and never investigated internally, especially around working culture and factors that require collection and analysis of data, e.g. Athena SWAN, Race Equality Charter. They force us to undertake reviews that do lead to changes in policy and practice centrally and through working with academic areas these aspects can be co-developed and adopted across the institution. Universities seem to be slow to change in certain aspects and culture change is a challenging area in which to make progress anyway, so it is vital that there is this external pressure for us to keep up to date with issues that affect the sector and have to review our ways of working to provide the best environment. Having this external oversight also makes for an easier case internally to acquire resource (staff; time) to undertake this kind of important review and improvement work. [Operational delivery, HEI/HEP](#)”

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

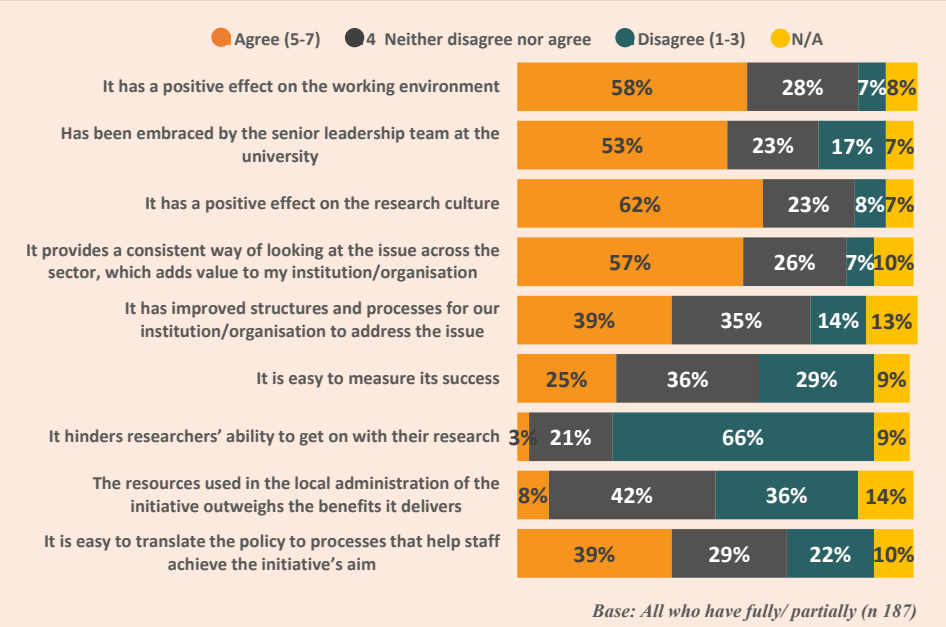
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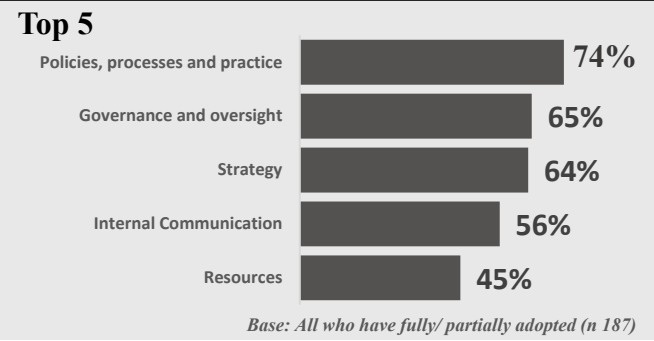
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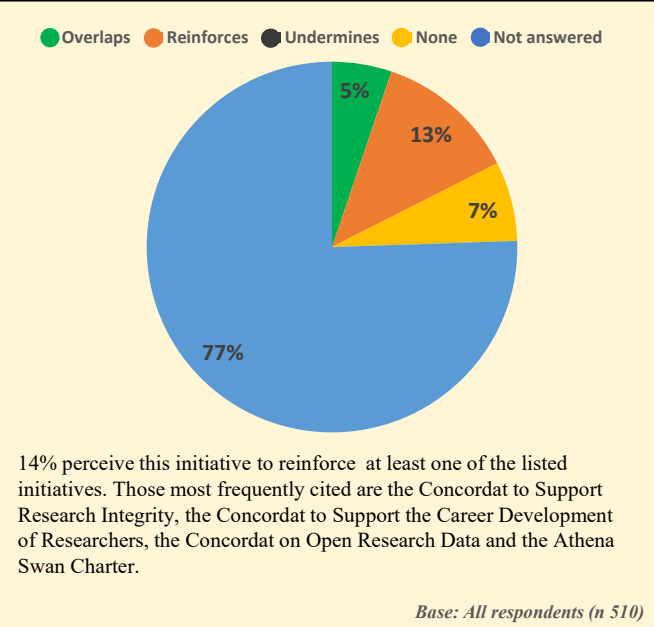
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Implementation



Relationship to others



Key benefits

“ These initiatives can provide frameworks for organisations to work on and improve in particular areas. However, they are often too check box and require significant resource that's focused on compliance rather than implementing change. DORA is an example of an initiative that lays out a clear vision, but leaves it up to organisations to implement themselves as they see fit. Athena Swan is an initiative that provides an award but requires a lot of dedicated resource to make submissions and uses very blunt metrics that don't necessarily capture real change on a complex issue and push organisations to focus on gathering certain metrics rather than addressing their own institutional issues. Strategic influencer and Operational delivery, Research Institute

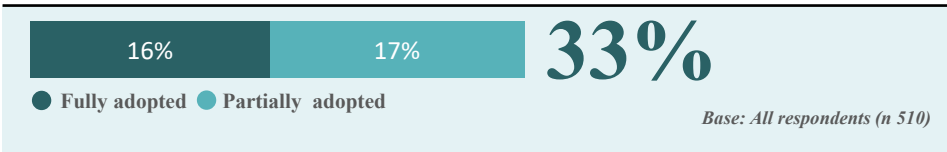
“ My answers to the questions so far have been very vague, this is because I am an administrator rather than a researcher. So while I have good knowledge of some of the initiatives I am not sure how they translate to the working practices or environment of researchers. As an administrator I can see massive benefits from DORA and the Leiden Manifesto in helping to change the focus from where we publish to what we publish. To making research openly available and accessible to all and to encourage a healthier, less competitive research environment. Operational delivery, HEI/HEP

Technician Commitment

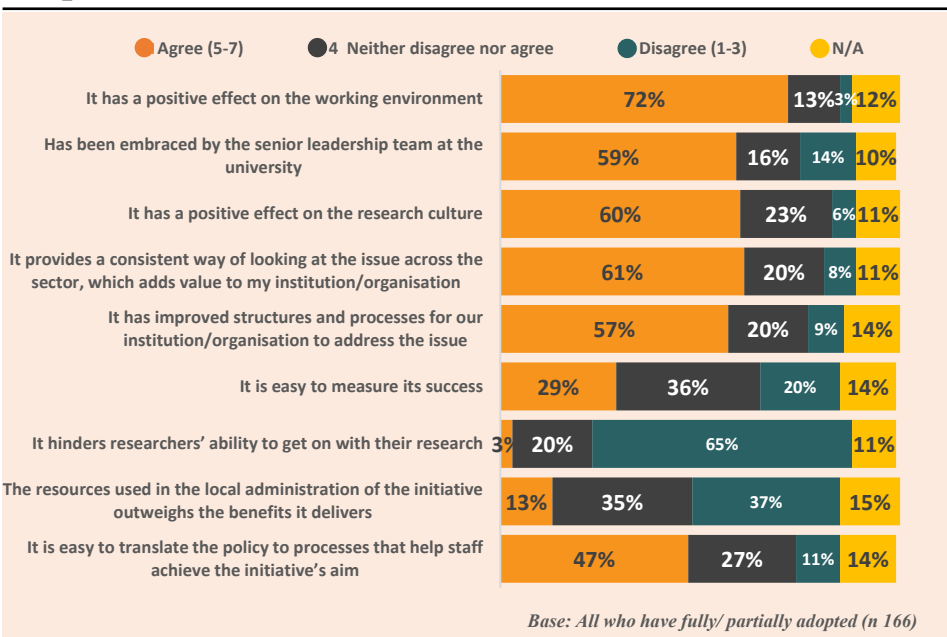
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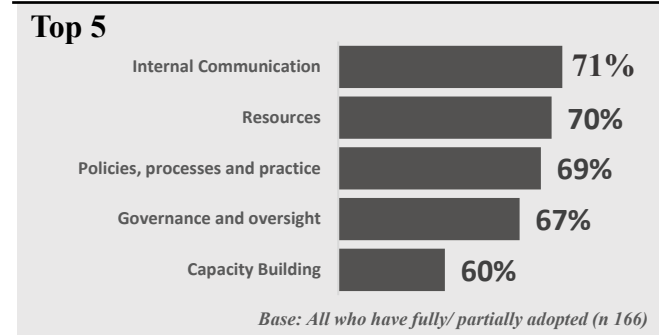
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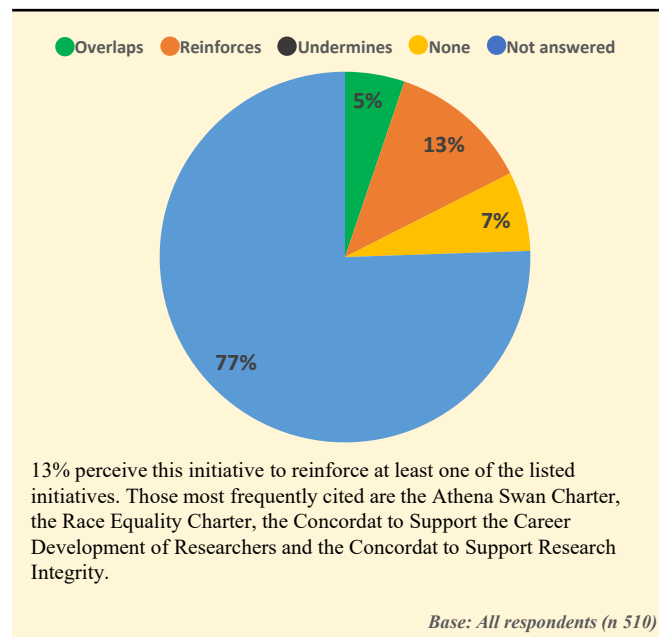
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Implementation



Relationship to others



Key benefits



Raising awareness of the value of diversity to research practice and outcomes; ensuring that senior staff are aware that the use of metrics should be taken alongside qualitative judgements; raising awareness of the contribution of research staff and technicians to research and how this can be better supported. [Strategic influencer, HEI/HEP](#)



The technician's commitment has raised the profile of the important part that technician's play in carrying out research. The concordat for career development is helpful in setting a benchmark of expectations. [Strategic influencer and Operational delivery, Research Institute](#)