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

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Statement on how the organisation creates, maintains and embeds a research culture that upholds a positive and inclusive environment for researchers at all stages of their careers *(max 500 words)*

The creation of a positive research culture is firmly embedded within our university and research strategies. These affirm our core purpose to develop and sustain an inclusive, healthy and supportive culture, welcoming and retaining staff and students from a range of backgrounds and inspiring them to achieve their full potential. We strive to create a sustainable, supportive and collaborative culture in which our researchers can thrive and develop as both researchers and individuals.

We are fully engaged with the principles of the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*, the *Concordat to Support Research Integrity*, the *Concordat on Open Research Data, the Knowledge Exchange Concordat*, and the *Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research*, and use these to guide the development of our research culture.

We promote a positive culture through the implementation of: supportive policies, processes and structures; strong leadership; quality infrastructure; excellent researcher development opportunities; and efficient systems.

We embed EDI in our strategies, policies, operations, and strategic thinking, recognising and valuing researchers with different backgrounds, attitudes, experiences, and career paths who bring fresh ideas and perspectives to our Institution. We believe in the benefits that come from having a diverse population and are committed to facilitating the widest possible applicant pool into doctoral study.

We occupy a compact campus which fosters collaboration between researchers at different career levels and across Schools. Our pan-University Graduate School is the central hub of our research activities and has transformed our research environment. The Graduate School (of which all academic staff and postgraduate students are members) provides an important dedicated space for networking, discussing research, training, sharing good practice and supporting peer well-being.

Our commitment to development ensures our researchers have access to, and the time for, the development of skills needed for employability, effectiveness, and career progression. Our Graduate School offers a comprehensive range of professional development opportunities and support including a formal training programme (80 events annually), one-to-one support (with funding applications, publications, research design, statistics, impact, business development, public engagement, and outreach) and a research seminar series. We endeavour to develop our researchers to be adaptable and flexible to ensure that they can succeed in an increasingly diverse global research environment and employment market.

Our research environment and researcher development provision has been commended over the reporting period in both our Enhancement-led Institutional Review and REF2021 institutional feedback.

Our research culture is supported and enhanced through our memberships of Vitae, the Scottish Graduate Schools, the Scottish Research Pools, the British Academy ECR Network, Universities Scotland, ScotHERD, and the Scottish Research Integrity Network. These groups provide our researchers with access to additional networks, training programmes and internships, and ensure sharing of good practice across the Scottish research sector.

Fostering a positive research culture and inclusive community is an ethos that threads through all that we do, and we endeavour to inspire researchers who are talented, caring, ethical and reflective professionals and who are committed to generating and mobilising knowledge across a range of scholarly, professional and public communities.

Provide a short summary of the institution'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) for your key stakeholder groups together with your measures for evaluating progress and success *(max 600 words)*

We have established a Researcher Development Concordat (RDC) group to examine how the principles of the Concordat are currently embedded within our Institution, explore how policies and processes could be improved and oversee the implementation of changes. The group is led by the Dean of Research & the Graduate School and supported by the Head of Researcher Development and Research Impact. The group has representation from across the organisation including senior academic staff, early career researchers, the Graduate School, and People Services.

We have chosen to implement the principles of the Concordat for all those engaged with research at Abertay. This includes all academic staff engaged with the conduct, supervision or management of research and Postgraduate Research Students (PGRS).

For each of the Concordat pillars our strategic objectives are to:

Environment and culture
- Embed a positive research culture and promote a supportive healthy working environment for researchers at all stages of their career to help them develop to their full potential and enhance their future career opportunities.

- Ensure researchers act in accordance with the highest standards of professional conduct.
- Support and promote equality, diversity and inclusion in all our strategies, policies and practices.
- Ensure that the culture for our researchers is inclusive, transparent, accessible and equitable.
- Review and revise our training provision to ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities, expectations and opportunities particularly with respect to the Concordat, Research Integrity, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- Invest in our research environment and infrastructure.
- Review and seek feedback on our research environment and culture and use this information to improve our institutional practices.

Employment
- Ensure fair, equitable and transparent processes for appointing and re-grading academic research staff and managing workloads.
- Ensure that researchers work in accordance with Institutional policies and procedures as well as the requirements of their Funders.
- Review and revise our induction provision for academic staff and PGRS to ensure all researchers are aware of policies and practices relevant to their position.
- Ensure researchers and research managers actively engage in regular constructive management discussions and continue to reflect and revise our process for this.
- Review and revise our training opportunities for research managers to ensure that they are equipped to provide effective line management and PGRS supervision.
- Ensure that researchers and research managers have a voice within the institution and provide opportunities for them to actively contribute to strategy and policy.

Professional and Career Development
- Provide the opportunities, support and time for researchers to engage in professional development activities that will improve their employability and career progression.
- Encourage and support researchers to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills.
- Encourage researchers to develop their experience of the wider research system and support their move between different sectors where relevant.
- Encourage researchers to maintain an up-to-date professional career development portfolio of research skills and experience.
- Ensure that researchers engage with career development discussions with their line managers annually.

- Develop and maintain a system to record, monitor and report on the engagement of researchers with professional development activities.

Measures for evaluating progress and success
We will review our progress against our action plan annually. This will involve assessing developments under each of the pillars for each of the key stakeholder groups against our targets. We will consider outcomes successful where changes to our policies and practices make us compliant with the Concordat. In areas where we are already compliant, success will be determined by the implementation of strategies and processes that are more efficient, effective, or inclusive for the relevant stakeholder group.

Summary of actions taken, and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars in respect of each of your key stakeholder groups [Institution; Academic Managers of Researchers (Deans, Heads of Schools/Departments/PIs); Researchers]	
Environment and Culture *(max 600 words)*	**Institution** All new researchers (staff and PGRS) undertake a compulsory induction programme which introduces the concepts of the *Concordat, Research Strategy, Research Integrity, Researcher Development, Research Supervision, University regulations,* and *Healthy Working Lives*. Both staff and PGRS inductions were revised over the reporting period to ensure important policies and practices are covered. We have revised our development provision so that sessions on *National Concordats* and *Research Integrity* are now compulsory for new researchers. *Research Integrity* (research ethics, data management, GDPR and open access) must also now be repeated every three years so that researchers receive the latest information. We have also given PGRS access to the mandatory staff training on *Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education* to ensure they are aware of EDI issues within a university setting. We embed EDI in all our research policies and practices to ensure that they are inclusive, equitable and transparent. We have comprehensively revised our research intranet pages over the last year to ensure that we have a dedicated compendium of all our research strategies, policies,

processes, and guides and make these available to all staff and PGRS.

We continue to invest in our research environment. Over this reporting period we have undertaken substantial refurbishment of our buildings and research laboratories, upgraded equipment across our Schools, and created new social spaces suitable for research discussions. Our technicians continue to support researchers working in our research laboratories.

We have continued to promote a healthy working environment (we hold an NHS Scotland Healthy Working Lives Gold Award) and actively address any incidents of bullying, harassment and poor research integrity.

We have continued to seek feedback on our research environment and culture and have used this information to improve our institutional practices (e.g., in response to feedback at our Graduate School Forum, we made substantial improvements to our PGRS process for recording development activities).

Academic Managers of Researchers

Our Research Managers continue to receive training on *Research Integrity* and *EDI* and are now required to refresh this training every three years.

To ensure that our researchers and managers act in accordance with the highest standards of integrity we had intended to introduce a regular sample audit of compliance for some processes (e.g., research data management) by 2021-22. This has been delayed due to the introduction of a new system to monitor this data.

We have revised our Flexible Working Policy (following the Covid-19 pandemic) to ensure all our researchers are supported by their managers to work as flexibly as appropriate.

Research Managers continue to have the opportunity to contribute to policy development aimed at improving our research culture through general fora and their positions on formal committees.

	Researchers We continue to encourage researchers to take advantage of the opportunities of our research environment and contribute to our rich, vibrant community. In addition to being supported by their line managers, research staff are also now mentored by senior research colleagues to learn best practice and ensure they are well supported in their research endeavours. They also have access to a cross institutional academic mentoring scheme to provide career development support. PGRS are supported by their supervisors and Graduate School staff. We have substantially revised our intranet pages over the reporting period to provide additional signposting to support new starts. Researchers continue to receive training on *Research Integrity* and *EDI* and are required to refresh this training every three years. **Progress** We were already compliant with many of the Concordat principles in this pillar. We have continued to review our policies and practices in relation to environment and culture and made several changes to improve what we do.
Employment *(max 600 words)*	**Institution** Our recruitment and promotion policies ensure fair, equitable and transparent processes for appointing and re-grading academic staff. We hold an Athena SWAN Bronze award, the Race Equality Charter Mark bronze award and are a DORA signatory. When considering appointments and promotions, we evaluate research on its own merit. All staff involved in recruitment are now required to undertake *Recruitment* training and all researchers complete mandatory *Diversity in the Workplace* and *Unconscious Bias* training. We strive to ensure interview panels have appropriate representation. We reflect annually on all our recruitment and promotion policies. The majority of our academic staff have both a teaching and research remit and are on core contracts. We continue to be

mindful of the challenges around employment insecurity and limit the use of zero-hours and fixed-term contracts to occasions where there is a genuine requirement for this type of flexibility. Our Recruitment Policy ensures that researchers on fixed-term contracts are not discriminated against in terms of access to career development activities and redeployment.

All new researchers (staff and PGRS) undertake a compulsory induction programme. Both programmes were revised over the reporting period to ensure that they cover all relevant policies and practices. We also amended the programme delivery to ensure volume of information was not overwhelming. All attendees now receive a copy of the programme content so that they can revisit it as required.

We continue to champion excellent people management through our comprehensive training offer, annual Development Discussions process, transparent promotion criteria and workload allocation planning. Promotion criteria are available on our intranet pages, and we hold annual training sessions to help staff prepare for an application. Individual workload allocation plans are now published internally to ensure transparency.

We have revised our training provision to ensure we provide line and project management opportunities for our Research Managers and Heads of Division. Training is provided through People Services and the Graduate School.

Academic Managers of Researchers
We continue to ensure that our Research Managers undertake relevant training and development so that they can manage research staff effectively. All Research Managers responsible for staff are required to complete training before undertaking management reviews and discussions to ensure they can best support staff.

We have developed new training for Research Managers who supervise PGRS to help them better support their students with professional development. This had been highlighted as a key weakness of supervisors in our last PGRS survey.

Researchers

	All researchers are required to work in accordance with institutional policies and procedures. Training on *University Regulations and Researcher Responsibilities* is now compulsory for new researchers. We have introduced a new Funding Support Team during the current reporting period to help researchers understand the terms and conditions of grant funding and work in accordance with them. All research staff are expected to have bi-annual personal Development Discussion meetings to discuss objectives, development needs, and general issues with their managers. Several revisions were made to the process last year to optimise its benefit to staff. Compliance with the process is managed by People Services. Over the current reporting period there was a 98% completion rate across the Institution. We continue to ensure that researchers and managers have a voice within our institution and can actively contribute to institutional strategy, policy and decision-making by providing them with opportunities to contribute to formal committees, groups and open fora. **Progress** We were already compliant with all the Concordat principles in this pillar. However, we have continued to review our policies and practices in relation to employment to improve our approaches and maximise awareness of the relevant issues.
Professional development *(max 600 words)*	**Institution** The Graduate School provides a comprehensive researcher development programme (80 sessions annually). We review and revise our programme each year to update knowledge, introduce new advancements and respond to the needs of our researchers. Over the reporting period we introduced 15 new sessions. The programme is entirely flexible to suit individual needs. Researchers are encouraged to develop discipline specific and transferable skills suitable for academic and non-academic careers. We record training to increase accessibility and enable researchers to review it at a time most appropriate for them.

Research staff have annual Development Discussion meetings with their managers. We have amended the process over the reporting period to include a dedicated research section. This has aided conversations about researcher development, enabled researchers to identify training priorities and facilitated planning. Time for researcher development is built into workload allocation plans based on these discussions. All research staff are made aware of their development time entitlement. All PGRS discuss development with their supervisors every 6 months and are encouraged to spend 3-4 hours per week on development activities.

We recognise that moving between employment sectors can bring benefits. During the reporting period we have supported internships and secondments to the Scottish Government, local government, Industry and the third sector. In addition, our Sabbatical Policy supports leave for researcher development.

PGRS keep a record of their professional development as part of their degree and this is formally monitored. Staff engagement with researcher development is overseen by line managers but is not formally monitored centrally (except for Development Discussions and some on-line training). Initial assessment of how to address this has highlighted the need for further work.

We continue to identify and engage with initiatives to improve development for our researchers e.g., in 2022 we joined the Scottish Consortium of the British Academy Early Career Research Network.

Academic Managers of Researchers
Research Managers engage in regular career development discussions with their researchers. Changes to this were implemented last year to optimise the process. Managers support their researchers to undertake relevant training to prepare for a range of careers and are aware of researcher entitlement for professional development.

Research Managers have opportunities to engage in leadership and management training (e.g., Advance HE Leadership programme). We continue to encourage and

support women to take part in the Aurora leadership programme and several of our staff are engaged as Role Models.

Researchers

Researchers are encouraged to take ownership of their career, undertake professional development training and work towards career goals. We are a member of Vitae and promote the use of the Researcher Development Framework to monitor skills development and identify skill gaps. We undertook substantial revisions of our package for recording PGRS training last year to improve functionality.

All research staff are expected to positively engage with career development reviews and 98% of staff had a Development Discussions meeting with their manager last year.

All researchers are encouraged to seek out opportunities to develop their research identity. We provide signposting in our Virtual Learning Environment (substantially revised last year) of relevant external bodies and groups that can further support researcher development and networking.

We encourage and support researchers to develop their understanding and experience of the wider research system. In addition to providing internal training on knowledge exchange, research commercialisation and public engagement we routinely advertise opportunities on secondments and internships for our researchers to explore.

Progress

We provide substantial professional and career development opportunities for our researchers and are compliant with many of the Concordat principles in this pillar. Additional work is required to improve our recording and monitoring of researcher development amongst research staff.

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)*

Although compliant with the Concordat in most areas we have continued to review our relevant policies, processes and practices to optimise them where possible. We have shown that it is possible to make improvements to established processes and that even small changes in policy and/or practice can have a beneficial impact for our researchers and institution (e.g., revisions to our induction programmes, appraisals process, training provision and research pages). We will continue to review relevant policies and procedures regularly to understand where additional benefits can be made.

We have identified two key areas where the lack of an appropriate system or process for recording and monitoring the data has hampered our progress and these two areas still require more work.

Sample Audits of Research Compliance

To ensure that our researchers and their managers act in accordance with the highest standards of research integrity and professional conduct we had intended to introduce a regular sample audit of compliance for some of our processes (e.g., research data management and open access data) by 2021-22. Initial review of establishing these audits showed that the data to be monitored was not kept in a consistent format across the University. To overcome this problem, researchers and their managers have been issued with new guidelines on the requirements for recording and storing information relating to research projects and outputs. These revisions have been rolled out over the current reporting period and will allow us to start to undertake sample audits during the next reporting period. We therefore intend to revise our Action Plan to meet this target in 2023-2024.

Monitoring Researcher Development Engagement

The monitoring and reporting of researcher engagement with professional development remains one of our key challenges in meeting the Concordat. Individual researchers keep their own records of development training, and these are not reviewed or recorded by the institution. Attendance at internally run events has routinely been recorded by the individual university sections responsible for event delivery, but this was not recorded centrally. Over the reporting period, People Services have started to pull together a central spreadsheet of staff attendance at university events, but this does not include PGRS. In addition, attendance at external professional development events and engagement with less formal training activities (such as one-to-one support activities and outreach events) are not recorded by the institution.

Our action plan stated that we would have an efficient staff researcher development training record system in place by 2024-25. At this stage we are unclear as to when we are likely to have a training record system in place or how comprehensive this development record will be. Initial exploration of using existing systems to formally record training centrally has identified two hurdles: 1) the practicalities of setting up

the system for recording the information and 2) our PGRS would need to be added or their data would need to be retained in a separate system. We will continue to explore the opportunities and limitations of different approaches over the coming reporting period.

Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period *(max 500 words)*

In the coming reporting period, our key objectives are to:

1. Conduct the CEDARS survey

We will undertake our first Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) between April and May 2023. All academic staff and PGRS will be invited to complete the survey which will be completely anonymous. The survey will provide important feedback on issues relevant to the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers including questions around the environment, culture, professional development, employment of research staff and the experiences of their managers. We will use this information to review and, where relevant, improve our institutional practices.

2. Undertake our PGRS survey

We will conduct our bi-annual survey of our PGRS community between March and April 2023. All active PGRS will be invited to complete the survey and provide feedback. The survey will be completely anonymous and will provide important feedback on our research environment, Graduate School community, research culture and policies relevant to the PGRS experience. Data from the survey will be reviewed and directly compared with data from previous years to determine areas of improvement and deterioration. We will subsequently use this information to review and, where relevant, improve our institutional practices.

3. Complete our Institution-Led Review of postgraduate research degrees

Our next Institution-Led Review (ILR) of our postgraduate research degrees and processes will take place in May 2023 to comply with the Scottish Funding Council's quality guidance that all credit-bearing provision will be reviewed at least every six years. The ILR will facilitate strategic and operational review of our provision. It involves a process of critical self-reflection that: identifies good practice for dissemination and areas for improvement; demonstrates engagement with external benchmarks; and demonstrates appropriate processes for engaging students as partners. It will involve an independent team reviewing reports, the evidence base and meeting with staff and students.

4. Implement a sample audit of research processes

Having undertaken the groundwork to introduce regular sample audits of compliance for some of our processes, we will undertake our first set of audits in

2023-2024. Over the coming reporting period we will create an audit process, determine the criteria for inclusion, draft audit forms and identify recommendations. Following the first round of audits the process will be reviewed and revised where necessary before rolling out subsequent audits. The process will be overseen by our Research Support Manager and Graduate School.

5. Further explore the creation of a researcher development record

We have started to explore how to monitor the engagement of researchers with professional development activities. We will continue to explore the options for the creation of a central training record for all academic research staff and PGRS. We have already identified some of the key issues with undertaking this task and begun to explore systems that could support the management of this. We will continue to review how best to collect this data for subsequent monitoring and reporting and determine what types of training could be recorded on the system.

Please provide a brief statement describing your institution's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body *(max 200 words)*

Our Researcher Development Concordat group has responsibility for the development and review of our Concordat Action Plan.

This report was initially drafted during January 2023 by the Head of Researcher Development and Impact and the Dean of Research and the Graduate School after reflecting on progress against our published action plan.

The report was reviewed by the rest of the Researcher Development Concordat group in February 2023. Comments from the group were reviewed and changes made to the report as appropriate.

The revised report was submitted as a paper to the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee for review and approval. The report was introduced by the Dean of Research and the Graduate School at the meeting in March 2023. Committee members had the opportunity to discuss the report and raise questions or make suggested changes. No changes to the report were requested by the committee and the report was approved at the meeting.

The report was approved by the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee on the 17th May 2023 (via delegated authority for the governing body).

The final version of the report was submitted to Universities UK on 14th November 2023.

Signature on behalf of governing body: *C Summers*

Contact for queries: n.white@abertay.ac.uk

This annual report will be analysed by Universities UK, 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 at CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk

www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk