

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

Universities and Research Institutes

Name of Institution	Abertay University
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Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk	7 th June 2024

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, researcher development provision and research degree processes has been commended over the reporting period in our Postgraduate Research Degrees Institution-Led Review 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 Development of Researchers

- 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

We have sought substantial feedback on our research environment and culture during the reporting period. Throughout 2023 we took part in the CEDARS survey, ran our biannual PGRS survey and had our Institution-Led Review of Postgraduate Research Degrees. We have used feedback from these three sources to substantially improve our institutional practices, including: *Revising our research induction process; Developing a new process for PGRS requiring reasonable adjustments; Creating a new support page for PGRS and Supervisors; Establishing a new group for Supervisors to share best practice; and Developing a new dashboard to monitor PGRS progress.*

We substantially revised our staff research induction process last year to ensure new staff receive important information about our key processes, compulsory training and University support in a timely manner, but without information overload. Our *New Starts* now have access to a dedicated page covering: *Research Strategy; Degrees; Supervision; Researcher Development; Data Management; Ethics; Funding; Impact and Trusted Research.* In addition, new starts must attend sessions on *Concordats, Regulations and Researcher Responsibilities*

and *Research Integrity* (ethics, data management and GDPR) within their first year.

All new PGRS undertake a compulsory induction programme. Attendance is strictly monitored and PGRS are not allowed to progress with their research until all sessions have been attended.

We have also developed a new process for establishing reasonable adjustments specifically for our PGRS population. Students with a disclosed medical condition or diagnosis that could impact on them undertaking the activities and examinations associated with their research degree will receive a Needs Assessment and a Personal Support Plan will be developed.

We continue to invest in our research environment. Over this reporting period we have continued to refurbish our buildings and research laboratories and upgrade equipment. Plans for refurbishment of our central Graduate School have been approved and will be undertaken throughout 2024/2025.

We embed EDI in all our research policies and practices to ensure that they are inclusive, equitable and transparent. We continually monitor our research pages to ensure that all our strategies, policies, processes, and guides are up to date.

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.

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.

We undertook a survey of our Hybrid and Flexible Working Policy last year 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

	<p>research culture through general fora and their positions on formal committees.</p> <p>Researchers We continue to encourage researchers to take advantage of the opportunities of our research environment and contribute to our rich, vibrant community. In order to improve the research community within our Graduate School we have been developing opportunities for more on campus networking.</p> <p>In addition to being supported by their line managers, research staff are 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.</p> <p>Researchers continue to receive training on <i>Research Integrity</i> and <i>EDI</i> and are required to refresh this training every three years.</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Employment (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p>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 required to undertake <i>Recruitment</i> training and all researchers complete mandatory <i>Diversity in the Workplace</i> and <i>Unconscious Bias</i> training. We strive to ensure interview panels have appropriate representation. We reflect annually on all our recruitment and promotion policies.</p>

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.

Induction was revised over the reporting period (see above) to ensure it covers all relevant policies and practices and is delivered in an optimal way – i.e. volume of information is not overwhelming and provided in a timely manner.

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 and are reviewed annually.

Academic Managers of Researchers

All Research Managers responsible for staff are required to complete training before undertaking management reviews and Development Discussions to ensure they can best support research staff.

During last year we focused on increasing compliance with both our internal and external compulsory research supervision training. We will continue to improve compliance with this during 2023/2024. Supervisors who are not compliant will have their supervisor status reviewed.

This year, we have developed new training and resources for our research supervisors to help them support students with their professional development. We also developed new guidance for our Research Degree Assessment Panel members who monitor student progress.

Researchers

All researchers are required to work in accordance with institutional policies and procedures. Training on *University*

	<p><i>Regulations and Researcher Responsibilities</i> is now compulsory for new researchers.</p> <p>We have introduced a new Grant Funding Process to help researchers understand the terms and conditions of grant funding and work in accordance with them. Further developments in this area will be rolled out in the next reporting period as we establish a new Research, Enterprise and Innovation Support Service for staff.</p> <p>All research staff are expected to have bi-annual personal Development Discussion meetings to discuss objectives, development needs, and general issues with their managers. Following revisions to the process two years ago to optimise its benefit to staff, the process remained the same over this reporting period. Compliance with the process is managed by People Services. Last year there was a 99% completion rate across the Institution.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Progress</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Professional development (max 600 words)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>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 5 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</p>

and enable researchers to review it at a time most appropriate for them.

Research staff have annual Development Discussion meetings with their managers. This includes 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. 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 reviewed by line managers during their Development Discussions. A newly established Learning and Development Practitioners Group (pulling together individuals from across the University with a remit for delivering training and development) has allowed a more holistic overview of attendance at University training events. Staff attendance is now recorded in a central University training database and a summary of staff engagement reported in an annual report to the University People Health and Equality Committee and Strategic Management Group.

We continue to identify and engage with initiatives to improve development for our researchers such as the Scottish Graduate Schools, Research Pools and the British Academy Early Career Research Network.

Academic Managers of Researchers

Academic Managers are expected to support their researchers to undertake relevant training to prepare for a range of careers and are made aware of researcher entitlement for professional development. Managers receive training on how to conduct effective Development Discussions meetings.

Research Managers have the opportunity to engage in our annual Leadership Development Programme and we continue to support women to take part in the Aurora leadership programme.

We continue to monitor whether our Research Managers are appropriately trained to manage research staff effectively.

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.

All research staff are expected to positively engage with career development reviews and 99% 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 of relevant external bodies and groups that can further support researcher development and networking. We continue to add resources to this offering as they become available.

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., through revisions to our research induction, appraisals, research degree processes, researcher development provision, supervisor training and research pages). We will continue to review relevant policies and procedures regularly to understand where additional benefits can be made.

Research Environment and Culture Surveys

A number of useful lessons were learnt in the current reporting period as a result of our participation in the CEDARS survey, running our biannual PGRS survey and through our Institution-Led Review of Postgraduate Research Degrees. Feedback from these three sources have led to a number of changes being implemented in the last year, including: *Revising our research induction process; Developing a new process for PGRS requiring reasonable adjustments; Creating a new support and information webpage for PGRS and supervisors; Establishing a new group for supervisors to share best practice; and Developing a new dashboard to monitor PGRS progress.*

Several other issues were identified from these reviews that still require to be addressed and will be key objectives for the next reporting period, including: *Developing new training for our research managers; Reviewing workload allocations for research; and Developing additional training in mental health and well-being support for research supervisors (see below).*

Monitoring Researcher Development Engagement

We have continued to explore the most effective way to record researcher development engagement over the past year following the difficulties identified with this in the last annual report. Staff and PGRS attendance at Researcher Development events is routinely recorded by Graduate School staff and kept in a spreadsheet. Due to the current differences in the way staff and PGRS development is reviewed and the fact that staff and PGRS records are managed by different University systems it has not been possible to have one central University record for monitoring researcher development engagement.

PGRS keep their own records of their professional development as part of their research degree and this is formally monitored annually by our Research Degrees Assessment Panel and formally assessed and approved at the end of the degree.

Only PGRS who demonstrate effective learning through their Professional Development Portfolios are permitted to submit their thesis.

Staff attendance at university researcher development events are forwarded to People Services and entered into a central University staff development database. Staff engagement is collated into an annual Learning and Development report which is reviewed by the University People Health and Equality Committee and Strategic Management Group. External researcher development activities undertaken by staff and less formal development activities (such as one-to-one support) are not reported to the University and are therefore not captured through this process. Staff continue to retain their own records of CPD (e.g. in PURE). Staff engagement with researcher development is reviewed by line managers during their Development Discussions.

Our action plan has been updated to reflect these lessons and our future plans.

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

In the coming reporting period (2023/2024), our key objectives are to:

1. Review and Revise Training Provision for Research Managers

Feedback from the CEDARS survey showed that researchers rated professional development and support highly. However, research managers identified a few areas where they had no or limited training and did not feel confident. This included managing reviews, supporting research careers and supporting staff with mental health issues. We will review training for our Research Managers and Heads of Division during 2023/2024 with a view to providing additional support for identified gaps.

2. Reviewing workload allocations for research

Feedback from the CEDARS survey showed that our academic staff felt that their workloads were high. We are committed to a reasonable, fair, transparent and equitable allocation of workload for academic staff that supports the strategic objectives and priorities of the University, whilst also having sensitivity to the development needs and circumstances of staff and our obligations outlined under the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers. We will therefore undertake a review of workload allocation throughout 2023/2024.

3. Develop training for research supervisors to better support PGRS with mental health and well-being

Feedback from our Institution Led Review of Postgraduate Research Degrees highlighted that our research supervisors often feel poorly equipped to support

PGRS with issues around mental health and well-being. In order to support this we have already created a PGRS and supervisor support page which signposts PGRS and supervisors to University and external support in this area. To further improve this we have asked our counselling team to create some digital resources for our research supervisors and we have also asked them to contribute a session to our compulsory supervisor training. These new resources and training will be developed during 2023/2024 and rolled out in 2024/2025.

4. Develop a new policy and training for the use of AI in research

The Graduate School will develop a new policy on the ethical use of AI in research. Guidance for both research staff and PGRS will be developed. We will also develop training around the ethical use of AI and its strengths and limitations.

5. Develop a new policy and training for *Trusted Research*

The Graduate School and Research, Enterprise, Innovation and Support teams will work together to develop and roll out a University Policy and training on Trusted Research to ensure all researchers understand the principles of Trusted Research and their responsibilities as researchers.

6. Develop and undertake an evaluation of our researcher development provision

To ensure our researcher development programme is meeting the needs of both our staff and PGRS we will undertake an evaluation of the programme in 2023/2024 to identify areas for improvement. Evaluation of individual sessions is not currently undertaken due to the size of the offering and limited staff capacity. The programme will therefore be reviewed more holistically as part of a University wide evaluation of our Learning and Development offer. The planned evaluation will focus on whether the research programme has improved knowledge and has been applied in practice as well as identifying barriers to engagement with researcher development.

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 drafted during April 2024 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 submitted as a paper to the Research Knowledge and Exchange Committee for review and approval. The report was introduced by the Dean of Research and the Graduate School at the meeting in May 2024. 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 1st May 2024 (via delegated authority of the governing body).

The final version of the report was submitted to Universities UK on 7th June 2024.

Signature on behalf of governing body:

Contact for queries: n.white@abertay.ac.uk or a.elliott@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