

Engaging with the principles of the Researcher Development Concordat

Background

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (Researcher Development Concordat), is an agreement between stakeholders to improve the employment and support for researchers and researcher careers in higher education in the UK. The original Researcher Development Concordat was published in 2008 and was revised in September 2019¹. It sets out three clear principles of **environment and culture**, **employment**, and **professional and career development**. The principles are underpinned by obligations for the four key stakeholder groups, funders, institutions, researchers and managers of researchers, to realise the aims of the Concordat.

There is a pressing need to develop a dynamic, diverse and inclusive system of research and innovation in the UK that is an integral part of society, giving everyone the opportunity to participate and to benefit. UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) expects the research organisations, including universities, in which it invests, to recognise and value their researchers and nurture them in reaching their full potential through the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. To address this issue, UKRI has published an action plan² and will work with other funders and research employers in creating a common response to the Researcher Development Concordat. UKRI will provide advice on implementing the Concordat principles through its grant terms and conditions and stakeholder engagement activities. It is likely that other funders will follow and require University signatory of the Researcher Development Concordat.

The Researcher Development Concordat has three defining Principles:

- **Environment and culture:** *Excellent research requires a supportive and inclusive research culture. Healthy working environments attract and develop a more diverse workforce, impact positively on individual and institutional performance, and enhance staff engagement.*
- **Employment:** *Researchers are recruited, employed and managed under conditions that recognise and value their contributions. Provision of good employment conditions for researchers has positive impacts on researcher wellbeing, the attractiveness of research careers, and research excellence.*
- **Professional and Career Development:** *Professional and career development are integral to enabling researchers to develop their full potential. Researchers must be equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse global research environment and employment market.*

¹ researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk

² <https://www.ukri.org/files/concordat-to-support-the-career-development-of-researchers-ukri-funder-action-plan/>

In signing up to the Researcher Development Concordat, the head of the organisation (the University Principal and Vice-Chancellor) is publicly committing to implement the Concordat Principles, and the organisation is committing to the following responsibilities:

1. Raise the visibility of the Concordat and champion its principles within their organisation at all levels.
2. Identify a senior manager champion and associated group with relevant representation from across the organisation with responsibility for annual review and reporting on progress.
3. For organisations employing researchers, ensure that they are formally represented in developing and monitoring organisational efforts to implement the Concordat Principles.
4. Undertake a gap analysis to compare their policies and practice against the Concordat Principles.
5. Draw up and publish an action plan within a year of signing up to the Concordat.
6. Set up processes for systematically and regularly gathering the views of the researchers they fund or employ, to inform and improve the organisation's approach to and progress on implementing the Concordat.
7. Produce an annual report to their governing body or equivalent authority, which includes their strategic objectives, measures of success, implementation plan and progress, which is subsequently publicly available.

Abertay Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan 2025-2030

Abertay University has been a signatory of the Researcher Development Concordat since December 2020; and engages with the principles of the revised Researcher Development Concordat and UKRI recommendations, to improve the way in which researcher development can be developed and embedded within the Abertay research culture.

The Vice Principal for Research and Innovation (Prof N White) is Abertay's nominated champion for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (CSCDR) and she works closely with the Head of Research Degrees, Impact and Researcher Development (Dr A Elliott) to deliver the Concordat action plan.

We established a Researcher Development Concordat (RDC) working group in 2020 to examine and monitor how the principles of the Concordat are embedded within our Institution, explore how policies and processes could be improved and oversee the implementation of changes. The CSCDR working group has representation from across the organisation including academic staff (early-mid career researchers and a senior academic), and staff from the Graduate School and People Services.

For each of the Concordat Principles, the key responsibilities are outlined for our main stakeholder groups:

- Institution
- Managers of researchers
- Researchers

These responsibilities are cast as obligations. Some of these obligations will take time to implement, while some may need to be adapted or might not be appropriate for Abertay.

The senior manager champion and the CSCDR working group have considered each key responsibility to identify where Abertay is already compliant and where we still need additional work to meet or enhance each of the principles. This has involved a gap analysis of policies and practices against the Concordat Principles.

The summary action plan below sets out our key priorities for addressing how we will improve our engagement with the aims of the Concordat during the period 2025-2030.

We have chosen to apply our action plan to all those engaged with research at Abertay, including:

- Staff whose primary responsibility it is to conduct research
- All academic staff engaged with the conduct, supervision or management of research
- Postgraduate Research students (PGRS)

Concordat Principles	Institutional actions and response	Research Managers actions and response	Researchers' actions and response
<p>1. Environment and Culture</p> <p>Healthy working environments attract and develop a more diverse workforce, impact positively on individual and institutional performance, and enhance staff engagement.</p> <p>This Principle recognises that a proactive and collaborative approach is required between all stakeholders, to create and develop positive environments and cultures in which all researchers can flourish and achieve their full potential.</p>	<p>1a. Ensure that all relevant staff are aware of the Concordat.</p> <p><i>Compliant through training provision, Research intranet pages, communication channels, and staff Development Discussions process.</i></p> <p><i>New staff with research responsibilities in their contract are required to attend compulsory training on 'National Concordats, University Regulations and Researcher Responsibilities'.</i></p>	<p>1b. Undertake relevant training and development opportunities related to equality, diversity and inclusion, and put this into practice in their work.</p> <p><i>Compliant through University Policies, training provision, and communication channels.</i></p>	<p>1c. Actively contribute to the development and maintenance of a supportive, fair and inclusive research culture and be a supportive colleague, particularly to newer researchers and students.</p> <p><i>Compliant through training provision, staff and student induction process, mentoring and buddying schemes, research leadership and staff Development Discussions process.</i></p> <p><i>To action: Introduce a session on the importance of positive research cultures for new PGRS to reinforce the importance of this at the start of their research career.</i></p>
	<p>2a. Ensure that institutional policies and practices relevant to researchers are inclusive, equitable and transparent, and are well communicated to researchers and their managers.</p> <p><i>Compliant through stakeholder engagement, equality impact assessment, formal committee approval, consultation events, research intranet pages, and other communication channels.</i></p> <p><i>Equality Impact Assessment guidance is provided for all those engaged with the development of RKE policy and practice, as well as RKE management and reporting.</i></p>	<p>2b. Ensure that they and their researchers act in accordance with the highest standards of research integrity and professional conduct.</p> <p><i>Compliant through compulsory research integrity training provision (refreshed every 3 years), and implementation of University policy, framework and reporting.</i></p> <p><i>Compliant through audit of policies and processes e.g., Research Data Management/ Open Access Data/ SDG identifiers etc.</i></p>	<p>2c. Ensure they act in accordance with employer and funder policies related to research integrity, and equality, diversity and inclusion.</p> <p><i>Compliant through University policies and training. All researchers are required to regularly complete compulsory training on research integrity and undertake EDI training.</i></p> <p><i>Researchers are supported by our Research Innovation and Enterprise Support team to ensure they are meeting Funder policies.</i></p> <p><i>To action: Revise peer review process to best support the development of competitive grants.</i></p>
	<p>3a. Promote good mental health and wellbeing through, for example, the effective management of workloads and people, and effective policies and practice for tackling discrimination, bullying and harassment, including providing appropriate support for those reporting issues.</p> <p><i>Compliant through implementation of University policies including Workload Allocation Policy, EDI Policies, Bullying and Harassment Policy, Research Code of Conduct, Research Integrity Concordat, Complaints Handling and Whistleblowing Policy.</i></p>	<p>3b. Promote a healthy working environment that supports researchers' wellbeing and mental health, including reporting and addressing incidents of discrimination, bullying and harassment, and poor research integrity.</p> <p><i>Compliant (see 1.3a).</i></p> <p><i>In addition, we have a 'Tell Us' reporting tool for staff to easily report any incidents of concern.</i></p> <p><i>We also provide a range of resources (training, information and signposting) on our intranet</i></p>	<p>3c. Take positive action towards maintaining their wellbeing and mental health.</p> <p><i>Compliant through training, Induction, Occupational Health service, Healthy Working Lives Group, and Student Academic Support.</i></p> <p><i>Staff and students can also access our newly established Wellbeing Clinic.</i></p>

	<p><i>Abertay hold an NHS Scotland Healthy Working Lives (gold award), Athena SWAN (bronze award) and Race Equality Chartermark (bronze award).</i></p>	<p><i>pages to support our staff and PGRS with mental health and well-being.</i></p>	
	<p>4a. Ensure that managers of researchers are effectively trained in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion, wellbeing and mental health.</p> <p><i>Compliant (see 1.3a and 1.3b).</i></p> <p><i>In addition, new training on ‘Mental health in the workplace for University staff’ was rolled out and made available to all research staff, academics and PGRS in 2024/25.</i></p>	<p>4b. Consider fully, in accordance with statutory rights and institutional policies, flexible working requests and other appropriate arrangements to support researchers.</p> <p><i>Compliant through implementation of our Flexible Working Policy and other EDI policies. A full review of our Flexible Working Policy was undertaken during our 2020-25 action plan to ensure it continues to meet staff needs.</i></p>	<p>4c. Use available mechanisms to report staff who fail to meet the expected standards of behaviour, particularly in relation to discrimination, harassment, bullying, and research misconduct.</p> <p><i>Compliant through implementation of University policies including EDI Policies, Bullying and Harassment Policy, Research Code of Conduct, Research Integrity Concordat action plan and Complaints Handling and Whistleblowing Policy.</i></p>
	<p>5a. Ensure researchers and their managers are aware of, and act in accordance with, the highest standards of research integrity.</p> <p><i>Compliant through implementation of the Research Code of Conduct, Research Integrity Concordat, Research Ethics Committee, briefings, and training (all researchers required to refresh integrity, governance and compliance training).</i></p> <p><i>In addition, we launched a new policy on responsible and ethical use of Gen AI in Research in 2024/25.</i></p> <p><i>To action:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Launch new University Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Strategy in 2025/26</i> - <i>Launch revised Research Ethics policy 2025/26</i> - <i>Launch new Intellectual Property Policy 25/26</i> - <i>Launch new Trusted Research policy and roll out associated training in 2026/27</i> 	<p>5b. Engage with opportunities to contribute to policy development aimed at creating a more positive research environment and culture within their institution.</p> <p><i>Compliant through engagement opportunities via:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (for academic staff, research staff and PGRS)</i> - <i>the Graduate School Forum (for PGRS)</i> - <i>short life working groups (for academic staff, research staff and PGRS)</i> - <i>consultation events (for academic staff, research staff and PGRS)</i> 	<p>5c. Consider opportunities to contribute to policy development aimed at creating a more positive research environment and culture within their institution.</p> <p><i>Compliant through engagement opportunities provided (see 1.5b).</i></p>
	<p>6a. Regularly review and report on the quality of the research environment and culture, including seeking feedback from researchers, and use the outcomes to improve institutional practices.</p> <p><i>Compliant through:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Committee reporting e.g. Research Knowledge Exchange Committee, Research Executive,</i> 		

	<p><i>Research Leadership groups, Research Degrees Committee, Graduate School Forum</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Institution Led reviews</i> - <i>Staff and student surveys (e.g. staff engagement, CEDARS and PGRS surveys)</i> <p><i>To action: Implement changes in response to feedback from our PGRS and staff engagement surveys to improve practices and process e.g. development of a new thesis submission guide and introduction of a new career and employability workshop 2025/26.</i></p> <p><i>To action: Implement a new University wide research seminar series to further encourage communication of research activities, networking and collegiality and promote greater interdisciplinary working in 2026/27.</i></p>		
Concordat Principles	Institutional actions and response	Research Managers actions and response	Researchers' actions and response
<p>2. Employment</p> <p>Provision of good employment conditions for researchers has positive impacts on researcher wellbeing, the attractiveness of research careers, and research excellence.</p> <p>This Principle recognises the importance of fair, transparent and merit-based recruitment, progression and promotion, effective performance management, and a good work-life balance. All stakeholders need to address long-standing challenges around insecurity of employment and career progression, ensuring equality of experience and opportunity for all, irrespective of background, contract type and personal circumstances.</p>	<p>1a. Ensure open, transparent and merit-based recruitment, which attracts excellent researchers, using fair and inclusive selection and appointment practices.</p> <p><i>Compliant through EDI recruitment policies and processes, communication channels, annual reporting and reflection, interview panel training and academic researcher representation on interview panels where relevant.</i></p> <p>2a. Provide an effective induction, ensuring that researchers are integrated into the community and are aware of policies and practices relevant to their position.</p> <p><i>Compliant through provision of a dedicated University Welcome and Induction Programme for both academic researchers and PGRS.</i></p> <p><i>Our staff induction process was reviewed and substantially revised during our 2020-25 action plan to ensure new staff receive crucial information in a timely manner without information overload.</i></p>	<p>1b. Undertake relevant training and development opportunities so that they can manage researchers effectively and fulfil their duty of care.</p> <p><i>Compliant through training provision, communication channels, staff Development Discussions and annual RKE planning.</i></p> <p>2b. Familiarise themselves, and work in accordance with, relevant employment legislation and codes of practice, institutional policies, and the terms and conditions of grant funding.</p> <p><i>Compliant through policies, training provision, communication channels, staff Development Discussions and annual RKE planning.</i></p> <p><i>Our RIES team (created during our 2020-25 action plan) ensure researchers understand the terms and conditions of grant funding and work in accordance with them.</i></p>	<p>1c. Ensure that they work in accordance with, institutional policies, procedures and employment legislation, as well as the requirements of their funder.</p> <p><i>Compliant through training and mentoring. Opportunities to report individual and systemic issues requiring redress. Researchers supported by RIES team (created during 2020-25 action plan) to ensure they are meeting Funder requirements.</i></p> <p>2c. Understand their reporting obligations and responsibilities.</p> <p><i>Compliant (see 2.2b)</i></p> <p><i>All those engaged with research are periodically required to refresh their research integrity (GDPR, data management, ethics and open access) and EDI training.</i></p>

	<p>3a. Provide clear and transparent merit-based recognition, reward and promotion pathways that recognise the full range of researchers' contributions, and the diversity of personal circumstances.</p> <p><i>Compliant through our annual promotion exercise for academic researchers which takes into account the full range of activities associated with an academic role including activities contributing to a positive University research culture and civic engagement activities.</i></p> <p><i>We hold an Athena SWAN Bronze award, a Race Equality Charter Mark and are a DORA signatory.</i></p>	<p>3b. Commit to, and evidence, the inclusive, equitable and transparent recruitment, promotion, and reward of researchers.</p> <p><i>Compliant through EDI Policies and processes, training, annual reflection and reporting as outlined in 2.1a, 2.2a and 2.3a).</i></p>	<p>3c. Positively engage with performance management discussions and reviews with their managers.</p> <p><i>Compliant through annual staff Development Discussions process, training and annual RKE Planning.</i></p> <p><i>PGR students required to develop and maintain a Professional Development Portfolio mapped onto the Researcher Development Framework.</i></p>
	<p>4a. Provide effective line and project management training opportunities for managers of researchers, heads of department and equivalent.</p> <p><i>Compliant through provision of training via the Graduate School and People Services.</i></p> <p><i>To action: development of a new training programme for Heads of Department from 2025/26. This will include training on equitable workload allocation planning and how to better support academic researchers with their careers.</i></p>	<p>4b. Actively engage in regular constructive performance management with their researchers.</p> <p><i>Compliant through annual staff Development Discussions process, training and annual RKE Planning.</i></p> <p><i>Compliant through research degree students developing a Professional Development Portfolio.</i></p>	<p>4c. Recognise and act on their role as key stakeholders within their institution and the wider academic community.</p> <p><i>Compliant through opportunities to engage with formal University committees, short-life working groups, fora, and events.</i></p>
	<p>5a. Ensure that excellent people management is championed throughout the organisation and embedded in institutional culture, through annual appraisals, transparent promotion criteria, and workload allocation.</p> <p><i>Compliant through University Policies, training, staff Development Discussions, RKE Planning, and communication (see 2.1a, 2.2a and 2.3a).</i></p> <p><i>Workload allocation was reviewed during our last action plan. Workload is reviewed annually and plans published internally to ensure transparency.</i></p> <p><i>To action:</i> <i>- Launch new University People Strategy 2025/26</i></p>	<p>5b. Engage with opportunities to contribute to relevant policy development within their institution.</p> <p><i>Compliant through opportunities to engage with various committees and groups, as well as through open consultation.</i></p>	

	<p>- Review the Development Discussions process with a view to optimising effectiveness 2025/26</p>		
	<p>6a. Seek to improve job security for researchers, for example through more effective redeployment processes and greater use of open-ended contracts, and report on progress.</p> <p><i>Compliant: Zero-hours and fixed-term contracts are rarely issued (and only when there is a genuine requirement for this type of flexibility). They are used for a specified time only. Employees on such contracts are not treated less favourably than permanent employees. We operate an effective redeployment process for staff. These processes are monitored by People Services.</i></p>		
	<p>7a. Consider researchers and their managers as key stakeholders within the institution and provide them with formal opportunities to engage with relevant organisational policy and decision-making.</p> <p><i>Compliant through opportunities for engagement with formal committees including Senate, Research Knowledge and Exchange Committee, short life working groups, fora, and open events.</i></p>		
Concordat Principles	Institutional actions and response	Research Managers actions and response	Researchers' actions and response
<p>3. Professional and career development</p> <p>Researchers must be equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse global research environment and employment market.</p> <p>This Principle recognises the importance of continuous professional and career development, particularly as researchers pursue a wide range of careers.</p>	<p>1a. Provide opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in a minimum of 10 days professional development pro rata per year, recognising that researchers will pursue careers across a wide range of employment sectors.</p> <p><i>Compliant through annual RKE Planning and Development Discussions, training opportunities and mentoring schemes. All research active staff have 10 days pro rata of development training built into their workload allocation model.</i></p> <p><i>PGRS are required to engage in 3-4 hours of researcher development per week as part of their Professional Development Portfolio Planning.</i></p>	<p>1b. Engage in regular career development discussions with their researchers, including holding a career development review at least annually.</p> <p><i>Compliant through annual Staff Development Discussions process, RKE Planning and mentoring schemes.</i></p> <p><i>Career development discussions with PGRS are encouraged every 6 months.</i></p>	<p>1c. Take ownership of their career, identifying opportunities to work towards career goals, including engaging in a minimum of 10 days professional development pro rata per year.</p> <p><i>Compliant (see 3.1a).</i></p> <p><i>In addition, researchers can enrol on career management workshops and meet with our careers service.</i></p>

<p>2a. Provide training, structured support, and time for managers to engage in meaningful career development reviews with their researchers.</p> <p><i>Compliant through annual staff Development Discussions, RKE Planning, mentoring, and workload allocation plans.</i></p> <p><i>To action: To review the Development Discussions process and tailor guidance on how to have effective development reviews.</i></p> <p><i>To action: New 'Research Lead' roles to be implemented in 2026/2027 as part of the new University Research Strategy (RLINCS30). These new posts will work with Heads of Department to better support academic researchers with their research plans and career development.</i></p>	<p>2b. Support researchers in exploring and preparing for a diversity of careers, for example, through the use of mentors and careers professionals, training, and secondments.</p> <p><i>Compliant through training, publicised internship and secondment opportunities, mentoring support and buddying schemes. All staff are encouraged to log Professional Body/Society registration and status in Pure.</i></p> <p><i>To action: New 'Research Leads' to be implemented to support Heads of Department in 2026/27 (see 3.2a).</i></p>	<p>2c. Explore and prepare for a range of employment options across different sectors, such as by making use of mentors, careers professionals, training and secondments.</p> <p><i>Compliant through provided opportunities (see 3.1a, 3.1b, 3.2a & 3.2b).</i></p> <p><i>In addition, researchers can enrol on career management workshops and meet with our careers service.</i></p>
<p>3a. Ensure that researchers have access to professional advice on career management, across a breadth of careers.</p> <p><i>Compliant (see 3.2b, 3.2c).</i></p> <p><i>Abertay is a Vitae member. We provide staff and PGRs with access to information about career paths through career management workshops and our careers service.</i></p> <p><i>To action: Introduce a new career and employability workshop for PGRs in 2025/26</i></p>	<p>3b. Allocate a minimum of 10 days pro rata, per year, for researchers to engage with professional development, supporting researchers to balance the delivery of their research and their own professional development.</p> <p><i>Compliant (see 3.1a). Research Managers and the Academic Leadership Group have oversight.</i></p>	<p>3c. Maintain an up-to-date professional career development plan and build a portfolio of evidence demonstrating their experience, that can be used to support job applications.</p> <p><i>Compliant (see 3.1a and 3.2b).</i></p> <p><i>Staff record their development in RKE plans and on PURE. PGRs are required to record their PDP activities online.</i></p>
<p>4a. Provide researchers with opportunities, and time, to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills.</p> <p><i>Compliant through workload allocation planning, provision of networking opportunities, and supporting training opportunities such as our Abertay Leadership Development Programme and the Advance HE Aurora Leadership Development Programme for women.</i></p>	<p>4b. Identify opportunities, and allow time (in addition to the 10 days professional development allowance), for their researchers to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills, and provide appropriate credit and recognition for their endeavours.</p> <p><i>Compliant (see 3.4a, 2.3a).</i></p>	<p>4c. Positively engage in career development reviews with their managers.</p> <p><i>Compliant (see 3.1a and 3.1c).</i></p>

	<p>5a. Recognise that moving between, and working across, employment sectors can bring benefits to research and researchers, and support opportunities for researchers to experience this.</p> <p><i>Compliant (see 3.2b, 3.3a, 3.4a), through close working with KE partners and employment sectors, and implementation of our Sabbatical Policy. Furthermore, Abertay are a signatory of the Knowledge Exchange Concordat and published its KE Policy in 2023.</i></p>	<p>5b. Engage in leadership and management training to enhance their personal effectiveness, and to promote a positive attitude to professional development.</p> <p><i>Compliant through University provision of opportunities (see 3.4a).</i></p>	<p>5c. Seek out, and engage with, opportunities to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills.</p> <p><i>Compliant through University provision of opportunities (see 3.4a).</i></p>
	<p>6a. Monitor, and report on, the engagement of researchers and their managers with professional development activities, and researcher career development reviews.</p> <p><i>Compliant through engagement with annual staff Development Discussions and RKE planning.</i></p> <p><i>Attendance at internal training and development sessions are recorded on a staff development database and we monitor compliance with compulsory training.</i></p> <p><i>To action: Continue to work with researchers to identify barriers to researcher development engagement and explore ways to improve uptake of our comprehensive training offer.</i></p>		<p>6c. Consider opportunities to develop their awareness and experience of the wider research system through, for example, knowledge exchange, policy development, public engagement and commercialisation.</p> <p><i>Compliant through engagement with RKE leadership and development opportunities (see 3.4a and 3.5a).</i></p> <p><i>In addition, we provide training on public engagement and commercialisation and share opportunities to engage with policy development through communication channels.</i></p>