

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

Universities and Research Institutes

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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 University of Dundee is committed to supporting the professional and career development of our researchers with a focus on academic excellence at all career stages. The University of Dundee became a signatory to the revised Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers in January 2021 (hereafter referred to as “the Concordat”) and has held the HR Excellence in Research Award (HR EiR) since 2010. The HR-EiR award was renewed in June 2024, recognising the University’s continued commitment to supporting an enabling and inclusive research culture as well as a thriving environment for our researchers. The original HR-EiR also endorses the University’s commitment to the revised Researcher Development Concordats.

The following report provides an overview of progress to date in implementing the obligations of the Concordat - setting out key strategic objectives to support researchers and embed a positive and inclusive research culture for them at every stage of their career.

A key element of the most recent University strategy that ties in with Research Culture is the People and Talent Enabling Strategy, which highlights, among other things:

- A renewed commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI strategy launch Oct 2024).
- A determination to deliver “exemplary staff development programmes” for all staff.
- The pursuit of best practice in reward and recognition.

While our relatively large population of research staff constitute the immediate beneficiaries of our actions in implementing the Researcher Development Concordat, a key feature of our approach going forward is to be maximally holistic, linking interventions specifically aimed at research staff to broad institutional change to the benefit of everyone wherever possible.

Governance Structures

The main university committee responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing the Researcher Development Concordat and the HR Excellence in Research Award was the Career Development for Research Staff Steering Group (CDRS).

Other relevant governance functions in the researcher development space are exercised by the Professional and Organisational Development Committee, the Research Governance and Policy Sub-Committee and the Postgraduate Research Sub-Committee.

At School level, the researcher development concordat is typically overseen by the Associate Dean for Research, and (where applicable) the Associate Dean for People, Culture and Performance.

New Initiatives

The University was awarded a £1m award from the Wellcome Trust Institutional Funding for Research Culture. This fund aims to transform the culture of research and its environment for the benefit of all and was initiated in May 2024. It widens access to funding and provides support under the following headings – Breaking Barriers, Support for Career Development, Support during School Holidays, Flexible Dependent Care, Leadership Transition Programmes, Carer Friendly Meeting Spaces and Research Culture Cafes.

New Appointments

In summary, new appointments to progress the aim of embedding a positive and inclusive research culture, with a remit for researcher development at the University of Dundee are:

1. Head of Research Culture and Environment, Jan 2024
2. Researcher Advancement and Culture Manager, Mar 2024
3. Research Culture and Environment Administrator, Apr 2024

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*)

Scottish universities face a particularly difficult funding environment over the near term, with inflation eroding block grants, cuts to Scottish Funding Council funding, and the failure to match new research culture funding available to universities in England. It is therefore important that our new action plan sets out ambitious but realistic and achievable actions taking account of these constraints, seeking to obtain maximal impact from careful use of existing resources.

The overall strategy for achieving this can be summarised by three main principles:

1. Ensure that the action plan is coordinated with and tied into other strategic actions by the University, as well as other relevant concordats and agreements.
2. Promote more joined-up messaging and service delivery by relevant professional services units while reviewing the centre of gravity for researcher development provision within the institution.
3. Empower research staff by strengthening representation and recognition.

The People and Talent Enabling Strategy and Implementation Plan has direct relevance to strengthening research culture and researcher development at Dundee. This includes internal projects leading to valuable new resources such as the creation of an institutional leadership framework as well as work on key processes such academic promotion criteria and workload allocation – which have the long-term potential to re-emphasise expectations around management practices.

Environment and culture

Staff engagement – delivering the baseline staff engagement survey in 2023 saw the beginning of our innovative approach of engaging with all staff as we work towards the outcome of developing a listening and actively responsive culture. A baseline and subsequent SMART measures specific to our researchers have been established (see Action Plan), with the next staff engagement survey running in 2025.

EDI - Implementation of a new online reporting mechanism for staff, including researchers, to report instances of discrimination, harassment and bullying in 2024 is anticipated to result in an increase in reported cases and enable targeted interventions to address these issues effectively. A baseline and success measures will be established in 2025. A subsequent SMART measure for this action is included in our staff engagement survey.

Employment

By committing to the principles of the Concordat and ensuring that researchers are better aware of opportunities and responsibilities in relation to career development by means of actions focused on induction, probation and appraisal the aim is to create researchers who know what they want to achieve in their career and the necessary steps to progress to their next position of employment.

Professional Development of Researchers

A new Dundee-centric Researcher Advancement Framework will be developed to help researchers identify their development needs and fulfil these with opportunities offered through the new researcher advancement training programme. Every session will be evaluated, and the evaluation scrutinised to look for future improvement opportunities. Sessions that have poor attendance will be offered as a series of rolling 'clinics,' so researchers can still access interaction with support services experts in a timely fashion, when they have a need for support, rather than when professional services run a session.

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

Significant actions have been taken to offer a more integrated and seamless approach to supporting research staff and their managers. Bringing the functions of research development and researcher development closer together in the Research and Innovation Services directorate, ensures that new or soon-to-be PIs are signposted towards support and expectations in relation to management and administration.

The institution has committed to resources in Environment and Culture by appointment of personnel within the Research and Innovation Services Directorate including a new Head of Research Culture and Environment at Grade 9 in January 2024. In addition, a new Assistant Vice-Principal for Research Culture and Environment has been appointed and will begin in October 2024. This is a position that is unique in Universities across Scotland.

The Head of Research Culture and Environment post provides strategic direction for researcher development and informs positive initiatives to improve research culture within the community, leading and overseeing the delivery of the action plan. Their role also oversees delivery of the Wellcome Trust Institutional Fund for Research Culture with the IFRC Management group and ensuring the Principles of the Concordat will be addressed through the proposed Research, People, Culture and Environment Sub-Committee.

The new Assistant Vice-Principal for Research Culture and Environment will convene the new Research People, Culture and Environment Sub-Committee. They will work closely with the new Research Culture and Environment team in RIS, the Library Services Research team and the People Directorate, as well as many of the other Directorates and Schools to take forward a University Research Culture Strategy.

Academic Managers of Researchers

To respond to specific feedback in the 2023 staff engagement survey, and our gap analysis for the Concordat in 2020, a new Management Capabilities Pathway for staff is being developed in 2023/24. One focus is on building skills in our managers to engage in more meaningful career development reviews with their teams with SMART measures included in the staff engagement survey.

Researchers

The Wellcome Trust Institutional Fund for Research Culture has been widely publicised to researchers through the staff newsletter and through targeted promotion. Researchers have been encouraged to apply for the numerous opportunities provided by this funding. The Wellcome Trust Institutional Fund for Research Culture has proved positive so far. A summary of the various projects that have been launched in reporting period 23/24 are as follows – Baseline Survey 305 responses. Leadership Transition Programmes launched (34 places), Breaking Barriers Scheme launched (8 applications), Flexible Futures Fund for support over School

	Holidays launched (130 places taken). All schemes were successfully launched and promoted.
Employment (<i>max 600 words</i>)	<p>Institution and Academic Managers of Researchers</p> <p>The People Manager Resource SharePoint now represents a one-stop-shop for most of the key information required by managers in relation to HR processes, replacing complex, multiple and sometimes opaque pages on the HR website, and including a dedicated section for managers of researchers. The resource, which has been heavily promoted in newsletters since being launched in September 2022 addresses a key need among managers of researchers for easy-to-locate, timely information in place of lengthy training sessions on compliance issues.</p> <p>A new guide on holding careers conversations has been drafted for approval, in collaboration with the Careers Service and Talent and Development, offering a handy resource to support and help normalise this practice among managers of researchers as well as the research staff they manage.</p> <p>Researchers</p> <p>Career Planning for Researchers is one of the workshops proposed in the new researcher advancement programme. Using resources from Vitae, researchers will be encouraged to look at the Vitae Researcher Development Framework through an Employability lens to identify their strengths and weaknesses, their core values and career drivers, helping them to define their career development plan and next steps. One-to-one career advice appointments are also offered through the University Careers Service.</p>
Professional development (<i>max 600 words</i>)	<p>Institution</p> <p>The institution has committed to resources in Professional Development by appointment of personnel within the Research and Innovation Services Directorate. In March 2024, a Researcher Advancement and Culture Manager was</p>

appointed at Grade 8, specifically to support researchers with their career journey, especially those wanting to take a research trajectory. Within their remit is the promotion of the Concordat and highlighting professional development opportunities to researchers at Dundee. To this end a short promotional video has been created outlining the entitlement of researchers to 10 days professional development pro rata per year, as well as planning for a training resource to educate researchers about the Concordat. It will be shared internally on The Research Culture and Environment SharePoint site, as well as promoted through the Staff and RIS newsletter.

Academic Managers of Researchers

A statement on Expectations of Managers of Researchers, promoting better understanding of the requirements of the Concordat has been written and will be presented to the inaugural meeting of RPCE-SC in October 2024 for approval.

The AEW (Academic Excellence Workstream) Inductions Working Group brought together professional services, academic and research staff to review best practice in inductions and create a series of recommendations. These are in the process of being consolidated into an easily accessible step-by-step guide accessible to managers across the university.

Researchers

A new programme of training and events is proposed and consultation with various focus groups will be carried out to inform what is included. Events will be promoted on the Research Culture and Environment SharePoint site. The researcher development policy has been thoroughly reviewed and updated to bring it in line with the expectations set out in the revised Researcher Development Concordat.

<p>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. (<i>max 500 words</i>)</p>
<p>As is the case with many institutions, the University of Dundee's previous action plan is reflective in some ways of the disruption and uncertainty associated with lockdown and the global pandemic. While in some ways this had the short-term effect of causing researchers and professional services staff to work harder on attempting to mitigate the most obvious impacts, it also disrupted the normal progress of researcher development activities and made community-building and engagement more of a challenge, as well as leading to (anecdotally) a sense of fatigue and consequently reduced social capital. The process of rebuilding from this has begun and will continue into the new planning period.</p> <p>We are confident that the approach set out in the University of Dundee's new HR Excellence in Research Award submission represents a genuine step forward for researchers at our university, linking their development and the culture in which they work to larger strategic ambitions for institutional change. We are fully committed to delivering this plan and are confident that it will lead to researchers who are more fulfilled, better represented, more uniformly well-supported by line managers and better equipped to progress their careers.</p>
<p>Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period (<i>max 500 words</i>)</p>
<p>Key objectives for delivering our plan in the coming reporting period for researchers at our university and linking their development and the culture in which they work to larger strategic ambitions for institutional change are outlined below. We are fully committed to delivering this plan and are confident that it will lead to researchers who are more fulfilled, better represented, more uniformly well-supported by line managers and better equipped to progress their careers.</p> <p>Key objectives of the People and Talent Enabling Strategy and Implementation Plan include:</p> <p>Leadership development for researchers – Beginning in 2024, three leadership programmes for our research community will be running, sponsored by the Wellcome Trust with the specific aim of exploring research identity and leadership skills. The programmes will be evaluated, their impact measured by a social scientist and results reported to The Wellcome Trust in 2026. This will be used to inform further initiatives developed to support researchers.</p>

To respond to specific feedback in the 2023 staff engagement survey, and our gap analysis for the Concordat in 2020, a new Management Capabilities Pathway for staff is being developed in 2023/24. One focus is on building skills in our managers to engage in more meaningful career development reviews with their teams With SMART measures included in the staff engagement survey.

The new committee structure and appointment of key personnel outlined in this report, will push forward the agenda of the Concordats obligations.

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*)

This report will be presented first to the Research, People, Culture and Environment Sub-Committee for approval. Subsequently, it will be submitted to the University Research Committee for approval with the intention of presenting it to the University Court in November 2024. The University is obliged to publish this report on its website in January 2025.

Signature on behalf of governing body:

Contact for queries:

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