

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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Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	https://www.abertay.ac.uk/research-overview/research-governance/
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Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk	May 2025

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 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 Faculties. 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 and development, sharing of good practice and supporting peer well-being. Our new dedicated Research Innovation and Enterprise Support (REIS) service is co-located in the Graduate School and provides support for staff and postgraduate research students.

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

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) and one-to-one support (with funding applications, publications, research design, statistics, impact, business development, public

engagement, and outreach). 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 culture is supported and enhanced through our memberships of Vitae, the Scottish Graduate Schools, Scottish Research Pools, the British Academy ECR Network, Universities Scotland (RKEC and RDCC), 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. We endeavour to inspire researchers to be innovative, collaborative, inclusive, caring, and 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 established a Researcher Development Concordat (RDC) working group 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 group is led by the Dean of Research & the Graduate School and supported by the Head of Research Degrees, Impact and Researcher Development. 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 research staff, 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 review our progress against our action plan annually. This involves assessing developments under each of the pillars for each of the key stakeholder groups against our targets. We consider outcomes successful where changes to our policies and practices make us compliant with the Concordat. In areas where we are already compliant, success is determined by the implementation of strategies and processes that improve our research culture and environment due to them being 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 sought substantial feedback on our research environment and culture during 2023 and 2024 through: a) the CEDARS survey, b) our PGRS survey, c) our Institution-Led Review of Postgraduate Research Degrees and d) our Staff Engagement Survey. Over the current reporting period, we have used feedback from these four sources to revise and improve several of our institutional research policies, practices and associated documents and forms.

All new academic and research staff are now provided with access to a dedicated *New Starts* page covering key relevant information required to support them in their first few months. 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 students are not allowed to progress with their research until all sessions have been attended. Our Research Degrees Student and Supervisor Handbook was substantially revised over the current reporting period to reflect changes in processes and provide new

	<p>information (particularly on research data management and our new support plans for students with mitigating circumstances).</p> <p>We continue to invest in our research environment. Over the reporting period we have continued to refurbish our buildings (including our library, student association offices, research laboratories, and social spaces) as well as upgrade equipment. Plans for refurbishment of our Graduate School have been developed throughout 2024, and facilities will be re-developed during 2025.</p> <p>Our new dedicated Research Innovation and Enterprise Support (RIES) service was established over the reporting period and will provide dedicated support for staff and PGRS for grant funding and enterprise activities.</p> <p>During the reporting period we have started to develop new policies, guidance and training on both the ethical use of Gen AI in research and Trusted Research.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>We have continued to promote a healthy working environment and hold an NHS Scotland Healthy Working Lives Gold Award.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p> <p>Our Research Managers continue to receive training on <i>Research Integrity, GDPR, Ethics, and Data Management</i> and are required to refresh this training every three years.</p> <p>Our <i>Hybrid and Flexible Working Policy</i> ensures all our researchers are supported by their managers to work as flexibly as appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>
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	<p>Researchers</p> <p>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 and have introduced a new calendar of social activities for our PGRS community to foster greater cohesion and peer support.</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. 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</p> <p>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>
Employment (<i>max 600 words</i>)	<p>Institution</p> <p>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 we strive to ensure interview panels have appropriate representation. All researchers complete mandatory training in <i>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education</i> and <i>Unconscious Bias</i>. We reflect annually on all our recruitment and promotion policies.</p> <p>The vast majority of our academic staff have both a teaching and research remit and are on core contracts. We continue to</p>

	<p>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.</p> <p>We continue to champion excellent people management through our comprehensive learning and development 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.</p> <p>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 recognising the importance of researcher development and our obligations outlined under the <i>Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers</i>. Findings from the 2023 CEDARS survey showed that a higher percentage of our academic staff reported that their workloads were high compared to benchmark data. We therefore undertook a detailed review of workload allocation during the reporting period. Individual workload allocation plans are now published internally to ensure transparency and are reviewed annually.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p> <p>Academic managers responsible for research active staff are required to hold an annual Development Discussion with them. Guidance is available on how to have effective career development reviews to ensure they can best support staff.</p> <p>During this reporting period we have continued to increase compliance with both our internal and external compulsory research supervisor training programme. Supervisors who are not compliant will have their supervisor status reviewed.</p> <p>Over the last year, we have developed new resources for our research supervisors to help them support students with their professional development and made changes to our forms and processes to provide greater clarity.</p>
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	<p>Researchers</p> <p>All researchers are required to work in accordance with institutional policies and procedures. Training on <i>University Regulations and Researcher Responsibilities</i> is now compulsory for new academic staff.</p> <p>The establishment of our new RIES service during this period has led to continued improvements in our grant funding process to help researchers understand the terms and conditions of grant funding and work in accordance with them.</p> <p>All research staff are expected to have annual personal Development Discussion meetings to discuss objectives, development needs, and general issues with their managers. Revisions over this reporting period led to 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>
Professional development (<i>max 600 words</i>)	<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. 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 video-record training to increase accessibility and ensure researchers can review materials at the time most relevant to them. Over the</p>

	<p>reporting period we introduced 5 new sessions and rolled out University-wide training on Trusted Research for all active researchers and research support staff.</p> <p>During the current reporting period we undertook an evaluation of our researcher development provision. Over 75% of respondents indicated that their level of knowledge had improved following attendance at Graduate School sessions and over 70% had been able to apply the new knowledge in practice. The main barriers to engagement were being too busy and sessions clashing with other University activities.</p> <p>Research staff have annual Development Discussion meetings with their managers. This includes a dedicated research section to aide conversations about researcher development activities and priorities. Time for researcher development is built into workload allocation plans based on these discussions. All PGRS discuss development with their supervisors every 6 months and are encouraged to spend 3-4 hours per week on development activities.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p> <p>Research Managers are expected to support their researchers to undertake relevant training to prepare them for a range of careers. Managers receive guidance on how to conduct effective Development Discussions.</p> <p>Feedback from the 2023 CEDARS survey showed that while researchers rated professional development and support highly, Research Managers identified gaps in training. This led to the development of a new internal Leadership Programme (run for the first time in June 2024) and additional training support will be further developed in 2024/2025. We also continue to support women to take part in the Aurora leadership programme.</p> <p>Feedback from our Institution Led Review of Postgraduate Research Degrees highlighted that our research supervisors</p>
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	<p>often felt poorly equipped to support PGRS with mental health and well-being. A new PGRS and supervisor support page now provides signposting to both internal and external support. Our counselling team have contributed material to one of our compulsory supervisor training sessions. A new course on <i>Mental Health in the Workplace for University Staff</i> will also be rolled out to all staff and PGRS in 2024/2025.</p> <p>Researchers</p> <p>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.</p> <p>All research staff are expected to positively engage with career development reviews and 99% of staff had a Development Discussions meeting with their manager during this period.</p> <p>All researchers are encouraged to seek out opportunities to develop their research identity. We continue to provide signposting to relevant external bodies and groups that can further support researcher development and networking.</p> <p>We encourage and support researchers to develop their understanding and experience of the wider research system. In addition to providing training on knowledge exchange, research commercialisation and public engagement we routinely advertise opportunities on secondments and internships.</p> <p>Progress</p> <p>We provide substantial professional and career development opportunities for our researchers and are fully compliant with the Concordat principles in this pillar.</p>
	<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. (max 500 words)</p>
	<p>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 found that even small changes in policy and/or practice can have a beneficial impact.</p>

Specific achievements over the current period with respect to the planned activities set out in our 2022-2023 annual report are:

Review and revise training provision for Research Managers

The 2023 CEDARS survey highlighted that Research Managers felt there were gaps in their training. In response to this we revised the internal training programme for our Research Supervisors and launched a new internal Leadership Programme. Additional training support will be identified and further developed in 2024/2025.

Review workload allocations for research

Results from the 2023 CEDARS survey showed that our academic staff felt their workloads were high. We are committed to a reasonable, fair, transparent and equitable allocation of workload for academic staff. We undertook a detailed review of workload allocation throughout 2023/2024. Individual workload allocation plans are now published internally to ensure transparency and are reviewed annually.

Develop training for research supervisors to improve support with mental health

Feedback from our Institution Led Review of Postgraduate Research Degrees highlighted that our research supervisors often felt poorly equipped to support PGRS with mental health and well-being. We created a new support page to signpost Research Supervisors and PGRS to both internal and external support. Our counselling team also contributed materials to one of our compulsory supervisor training sessions. Additional training will be rolled out in 2024/2025.

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

The Graduate School has started to develop a new policy and information and guidance document on the ethical use of Gen AI in research. This will be reviewed at relevant committees and rolled out in 2024/2025. Training on the use of Gen AI and how it can be used responsibly for research is also being developed and will be rolled out in 2024/2025.

Develop a new policy and training for *Trusted Research*

We rolled out University-wide training on *Trusted Research* for all active researchers and research support staff in 2024. The development of a new policy on *Trusted Research* has been delayed due to changes in staffing. Staff to be appointed within the new Research, Innovation, Enterprise and Support team will develop a policy in 2024/2025.

Develop and undertake an evaluation of our researcher development provision

To ensure our researcher development programme meets the needs of research staff and PGRS we undertook an evaluation in 2023/2024. Over 75% of respondents indicated that their level of knowledge had improved following attendance at Graduate School sessions and over 70% had applied the new knowledge in practice.

<p>The main barriers to engagement were being too busy and sessions clashing with other activities.</p> <p>Our action plan has been updated to reflect lessons learnt, amend timelines and add in future plans.</p>
<p>Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period (max 500 words)</p>
<p>We will continue to review our relevant policies, processes and practices regularly to explore where additional benefits can be made.</p> <p>In the coming reporting period (2024/2025), our key objectives are to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <p>1. Establish a new Research Degrees Committee</p> <p>To ensure our policies and processes for our Postgraduate Research Degrees are appropriate we will launch a Research Degrees Committee in 2024/2025. The committee will be responsible for: a) developing and enhancing the Research Degree programme provision, culture and environment; b) ensuring that the quality and standards of research degree awards are being maintained; and c) monitoring Research Degree processes, including academic regulations, admissions, registrations, supervision, researcher development, progress and examination.</p> <p>2. Roll out new training for practice-based research methods</p> <p>We will develop a new series of sessions on practice-based research to add to our Researcher Development Programme offer. These sessions will compliment our existing sessions on quantitative and qualitative research methods.</p> <p>3. Review and revise training provision for Research Managers</p> <p>Following on from work started in 2023/2024 we will continue to review and revise training for our Research Managers during 2024/2025 to provide additional support for identified gaps.</p> <p>4. Roll out training to better support mental health and well-being</p> <p>Following on from work started in 2023/2024 we will roll out additional training on mental health to enable research managers to better support research staff and PGRS with mental health and well-being. A new course on <i>Mental Health in the Workplace for University Staff</i> will be rolled out to all staff and PGRS in 2024/2025.</p> <p>5. Roll out a new policy and training for the use of Gen AI in research</p> <p>We will launch our new policy and information and guidance document on the ethical use of Gen AI in research. We will develop training on the use of Gen AI and how it can be used responsibly for research.</p>

6. Develop a new policy for *Trusted Research*

Following the roll-out of *Trusted Research* training in 2023/2024, we will develop a University Policy on *Trusted Research* to ensure all researchers understand the principles and their responsibilities.

7. Undertake our PGRS survey

We will conduct our bi-annual survey of our PGRS community between March and April 2025. All PGRS will be invited to provide feedback on our research environment, Graduate School community, research culture and policies relevant to the PGRS experience. We will use feedback to review and, where relevant, improve our institutional practices.

8. Review our internal peer review process for grant applications

We will review our Internal Peer Review process for the submission of grant applications to ensure it maps onto the revised funding application process implemented by the new RIES team and ensure it best supports researchers with their grant development needs.

9. Work closely with the new Scottish Research Cultures Collaboration Manager

We will work closely with the newly appointed Scottish Research Cultures Collaboration Manager (post funded by the Scottish Funding Council) to explore best practice with respect to research culture and capitalise on Scotland-wide collaborative opportunities.

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 was drafted during March/April 2025 by the Head of Research Degrees, Impact and Researcher Development and the Dean of Research and the Graduate School after reflecting on progress against our published action plan. The report was reviewed and agreed by our wider Researcher Development Concordat group which has responsibility for the development and review of our Concordat Action Plan.

The report was submitted as a paper to the Research Knowledge and Exchange Committee for review and approval in April 2025. The report was introduced by the Head of Research Degrees, Impact and Researcher Development. 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.

The report was approved by the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee on 23rd April 2025 (via delegated authority of the governing body).

The final version of the report was submitted to Universities UK in May 2025

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