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 2019[1]. 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 plan[2] 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.

Abertay University is a signatory of the Researcher Development Concordat (December 2020); and will engage 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 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.*

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[1] researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk

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

- **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.*

In signing up to the Researcher Development Concordat, the head of the organisation (the University Principal) 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.

*The Dean of Research and the Graduate School (Prof N White) is the nominated Concordat champion and she works closely with the Head of Research Degrees, Impact and Researcher Development (Dr A Elliott) to deliver the Concordat action plan. The associated working group has relevant representation from across the organisation including academic staff, early career researchers, and People Services.

a) Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan 2020-25

For each of the Concordat Principles, key responsibilities are outlined (see table below) for the main stakeholder groups; researchers, managers of researchers, institutions (and funders). 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 associated group have considered each key responsibility to identify where we are already compliant and where we will need additional work to meet 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 new key priorities for addressing how we will improve our engagement with the aims of the Concordat. The action plan applies to all those engaged with research at Abertay.

Concordat Principles	Institutional actions and response	Research Managers actions and response	Researchers' actions and response
1. Environment and Culture Healthy working environments attract and develop a more diverse workforce, impact positively on individual and institutional performance, and enhance staff engagement. 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.	1a. Ensure that all relevant staff are aware of the Concordat. *Compliant through training provision, communication channels and staff Development Discussions process.* *New staff with research in their contract are required to attend compulsory training on National Concordats, University Regulations and Researcher Responsibilities.*	1b. Undertake relevant training and development opportunities related to equality, diversity and inclusion, and put this into practice in their work. *Compliant through University training provision and communication channels.*	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. *Compliant through training provision, induction, mentoring and buddying schemes, research leadership and staff Development Discussions process.*
	2a. Ensure that institutional policies and practices relevant to researchers are inclusive, equitable and transparent, and are well communicated to researchers and their managers. *Compliant through stakeholder engagement, equality impact assessment, formal committee approval and communication channels.* *Compliant through Equality Impact Assessment training for all those engaged with the development of RKE policy and practice, as well as RKE management and reporting.*	2b. Ensure that they and their researchers act in accordance with the highest standards of research integrity and professional conduct. *Compliant through training provision, implementation of policies, framework and reporting.* *Compliant through audit of policies and processes e.g., Research Data Management/ Open Access Data/ SDG identifiers.*	2c. Ensure they act in accordance with employer and funder policies related to research integrity, and equality, diversity and inclusion. *Compliant through policies and training. All those engaged with research are periodically required to refresh their research integrity (GDPR, data management, ethics and open access) and ED&I training.*
	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. *Compliant through implementation of the Workload Allocation Policy, EDI Policies, Research Code of Conduct, Complaints Handling including Whistleblowing Policy, and training. Abertay hold Healthy Working Lives gold, Athena SWAN bronze and Race Equality Chartermark bronze awards.*	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. *Compliant (see 1.3a).* *Additional training and resources for research supervisors to help them support Postgraduate Research Students implemented in 2024.* *New training in mental health for all academic, research staff and PGRS to be made available from 2025.*	3c. Take positive action towards maintaining their wellbeing and mental health. *Compliant through training, Induction, Occupational Health service, Healthy Working Lives Group, and Student Academic Support.* *Additional resources and signposting for Postgraduate Research Students implemented in 2024.*

	4a. Ensure that managers of researchers are effectively trained in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion, wellbeing and mental health. *Compliant (see 1.3a).*	4b. Consider fully, in accordance with statutory rights and institutional policies, flexible working requests and other appropriate arrangements to support researchers. *Compliant through implementation of our Flexible Working Policy and other EDI policies. Review of Flexible Working Policy in 2023 undertaken to ensure it continues to meet staff needs.*	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. *Compliant (see 1.3a).*
	5a. Ensure researchers and their managers are aware of, and act in accordance with, the highest standards of research integrity. *Compliant through implementation of the Research Code of Conduct, Research Integrity Concordat action plan, communication channels, Research Ethics Committee, briefings and training.* *All researchers required to periodically refresh their engagement with research integrity, governance and compliance training.* *New policies and training on Trusted Research and Responsible and ethical use of Gen AI in research will be developed and launched in 24/25.*	5b. Engage with opportunities to contribute to policy development aimed at creating a more positive research environment and culture within their institution. *Compliant through engagement opportunities via:* - *the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) - for academic, research staff and PGRS* - *the Graduate School Forum (GSF) - for PGRS* - *short life working groups (SLWGs) – for academic, research staff and PGRS*	5c. Consider opportunities to contribute to policy development aimed at creating a more positive research environment and culture within their institution. *Compliant (see 1.5b).*
	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. *Compliant through RKEC reporting, feedback from Research Leadership groups, the Research Executive, Graduate School Forum, reporting and surveys (e.g. staff engagement survey, CEDARS survey and PGRS survey).* *Institution Led review of Postgraduate Research Degrees in 2023. Responses to feedback and changes to policy/process implemented in 2024.* *New Research Degrees Committee to be launched 2024/2025 to oversee the Research Degree programme provision, culture and environment.*		

Concordat Principles	Institutional actions and response	Research Managers actions and response	Researchers' actions and response
2. Employment Provision of good employment conditions for researchers has positive impacts on researcher wellbeing, the attractiveness of research careers, and research excellence. 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.	1a. Ensure open, transparent and merit-based recruitment, which attracts excellent researchers, using fair and inclusive selection and appointment practices. *Compliant through EDI recruitment policies and processes, communication channels, annual reflection and reporting, interview panel training and academic researcher representation on interview panels where relevant.*	1b. Undertake relevant training and development opportunities so that they can manage researchers effectively and fulfil their duty of care. *Compliant through training provision, communication channels, staff Development Discussions and annual RKE planning.*	1c. Ensure that they work in accordance with, institutional policies, procedures and employment legislation, as well as the requirements of their funder. *Compliant through training and mentoring. Opportunities to report individual and systemic issues requiring redress.*
	2a. Provide an effective induction, ensuring that researchers are integrated into the community and are aware of policies and practices relevant to their position. *Compliant through provision of a dedicated University Welcome and Induction Programme for academic research staff and PGRS.* *RKE Induction process reviewed and substantially revised in 2023/2024 to ensure new staff receive crucial information in a timely manner without information overload.*	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. *Compliant through policies, training provision, communication channels, staff Development Discussions and annual RKE planning.* *New Research, Innovation and Enterprise Support (RIES) service to be launched in 2024 /2025 to ensure researchers understand the terms and conditions of grant funding and work in accordance with them.*	2c. Understand their reporting obligations and responsibilities. *Compliant (see 2.2b)* *All those engaged with research are periodically required to refresh their research integrity (GDPR, data management, ethics and open access) and ED&I training.*
	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. *Compliant (see 2.1a).* *We hold an Athena SWAN Bronze award, a Race Equality Charter Mark and are a DORA signatory.*	3b. Commit to, and evidence, the inclusive, equitable and transparent recruitment, promotion, and reward of researchers. *Compliant through EDI Policies and processes, training, annual reflection and reporting.*	3c. Positively engage with performance management discussions and reviews with their managers. *Compliant through training, staff Development Discussions, and annual RKE Planning.* *PGR students required to develop and maintain a Professional Development Portfolio mapped onto the Researcher Development Framework.*
	4a. Provide effective line and project management training opportunities for managers of researchers, heads of department and equivalent. *Compliant through provision of training via the Graduate School and People Services.*	4b. Actively engage in regular constructive performance management with their researchers. *Compliant through training, staff Development Discussions, and annual RKE Planning.*	4c. Recognise and act on their role as key stakeholders within their institution and the wider academic community. *Compliant through researcher engagement with formal University committees, SLWGs, fora, and events.*

	During 2024/2025 a review of training for research managers will be undertaken. Identified gaps in training will be met through formal training and/or mentoring.	*Compliant through research degree students developing a Professional Development Portfolio.*	
	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. *Compliant through training, staff Development Discussions, annual RKE Planning, and communication of promotion criteria.* *A review of workload allocation for research active staff was completed in 2023/24. Workload allocation plans now published internally to ensure transparency and are reviewed annually.*	5b. Engage with opportunities to contribute to relevant policy development within their institution. *Compliant through opportunities to engage with various committees and groups, as well as through open consultation.*	
	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. *Compliant: Zero-hours contracts and fixed-term contracts are issued on limited occasions only, when there is a genuine requirement for this type of flexibility. They are used for a specified time or end when a specified task (or funding) has been completed and are not treated any less favourably than permanent employees. Reviewed and reported by People Services.*		
	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. *Compliant through opportunities for engagement with formal committees including Senate, Research Knowledge and Exchange Committee SLWGs, fora, and open events.*		

Concordat Principles	Institutional actions and response	Research Managers actions and response	Researchers' actions and response
3. Professional and career development Researchers must be equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse global research environment and employment market. This Principle recognises the importance of continuous professional and career development, particularly as researchers pursue a wide range of careers.	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. *Compliant through internal and external training opportunities, Development Discussions and annual RKE Planning, mentoring schemes, and Workload Allocation plans. All research active staff have 10 days pro rata of development training built into their workload allocation model.* *PGRS are encouraged to engage in 3-4 hours of researcher development per week as part of their Professional Development Portfolio Planning.* *In 2023/2024, we established an effective University training record system for capturing internal researcher development engagement.*	1b. Engage in regular career development discussions with their researchers, including holding a career development review at least annually. *Compliant through annual Staff Development Discussions and RKE Planning and mentoring schemes.* *Career development discussions with PGRS are encouraged every 6 months.*	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. *Compliant (see 3.1a).* *Furthermore, researchers can enrol on career management workshops.*
	2a. Provide training, structured support, and time for managers to engage in meaningful career development reviews with their researchers. *Compliant through annual staff Development Discussions, RKE Planning, mentoring, and Workload Allocation plans (see 2.4b).* *Guidance is available for managers on how to have effective career development reviews.*	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. *Compliant through training, publicised internship and secondment opportunities and mentoring support.* *All staff are encouraged to log Professional Body/Society registration and status in Pure.*	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. *Compliant (see 3.1a, 3.2a & 3.2b).*
	3a. Ensure that researchers have access to professional advice on career management, across a breadth of careers. *Compliant (see 3.2b, 3.2c). Abertay is a Vitae member, giving staff and research degree students access to information about a range of career paths.*	3b. Allocate a minimum of 10 days pro rata, per year, for their researchers to engage with professional development, supporting researchers to balance the delivery of their research and their own professional development. *Compliant (see 3.1a). Managers and the Academic Leadership Group have oversight.*	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. *Compliant (see3.1a and 3.2b).*

4a. Provide researchers with opportunities, and time, to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills. *Compliant through training opportunities including internal training on research leadership, developing a research niche, and Workload Allocation planning.*	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. *Compliant (see 3.4a, 2.3a).*	4c. Positively engage in career development reviews with their managers. *Compliant (see 3.1c).*
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. *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.*	5b. Engage in leadership and management training to enhance their personal effectiveness, and to promote a positive attitude to professional development. *Compliant through internal and external training opportunities.* *In 2024, established an effective University training record system for capturing internal researcher development engagement.*	5c. Seek out, and engage with, opportunities to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills. *Compliant through internal and external training and networking opportunities.*
6a. Monitor, and report on, the engagement of researchers and their managers with professional development activities, and researcher career development reviews. *Compliant through engagement with staff Development Discussions and monitoring of on-line compliance training.* *RKE Planning is now monitored.* *Established an effective University training record system for capturing internal researcher development engagement.* *Evaluation of Researcher Development Programme undertaken in 2023/2024 showed improved knowledge and application of skills. Barriers to engagement will be explored further.*		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. *Compliant through engagement with RKE leadership and development opportunities (see 3.5a, 3.5b and 3.5c).*

Note: At Abertay University, the Concordat beneficiaries are postgraduate research students (PGRS), those whose primary responsibility it is to conduct research, and all academic staff engaged with the conduct, supervision and management of research.