**UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING**

**UNIVERSITY STRATEGY AND POLICY GROUP**

**Annual reporting of Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers Action Plan 2021-2023**

**Introduction and Purpose**

1. This paper summarises the University’s progress in delivering on the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (hereafter referred to as the ‘Concordat’) 2021-2023 action plan during the period October 2021 to September 2022 (year 1).
2. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper and appendix.

University of Stirling became a Concordat signatory in October 2020, the Research Environment Group (REG) developed a two-year cross-university action plan that aligns to the three core Concordat principles: Environment and Culture; Employment; and Professional and Career Development. Progress against the action plan is reviewed annually and this first report outlines progress against action plan objectives, activities undertaken and future plans.

In this first year of the action plan, progress has been made in relation to supporting early career researchers, creating a positive environment and culture, promoting professional development, and a social culture, identity and engagement. Specific outcomes include i) the creation of a contract researchers’ career development form (Achieving Success ) to embed career development conversations as a core part of contract researchers’ personal development; ii) delivery of the annual Research Culture Awards to recognise and celebrate research staff who demonstrate good role modelling and reflect the best of the University's research culture.; iii) approval of the University's Mental Health Strategy 2021-24 and associated training programmes; iv) tailored leadership and research project management training opportunities; v) hosting of a Professorial Colloquium focusing on research culture; and vi) an Induction events and guide for new staff.

During the second year of the action plan REG subgroups will: i) conduct the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Development Survey to capture feedback on the research environment; ii) establish a Research Culture network; iii) create a Researcher Guide to support all research active staff navigate roles and responsibilities; iv) develop guidance around recruitment, promotion and career advancement and responsible assessment; v) continuation of the Professorial Colloquia series and vi) developing a statement of intent to deliver on the commitment as signatory to promote 10 days professional development.

**Background**

1. The [Concordat](https://researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk/) is an agreement between universities, research institutes and funders to collectively improve research cultures, processes and behaviours to best support the career development of researchers in the UK. It sets out three [principles](https://www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat_principles) of *environment and culture, employment*, and *professional and career development*. Universities UK is secretariat to the Concordat and there are 100+ organisational signatories to date.
2. The University became a signatory in October 2020 and is obliged to present a yearly report to Court on strategic objectives, progress in plan implementation, measures of success, learnings from progress and future plans. This report is subsequently made publicly available and HEI reports are reviewed by the Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group, supported by Universities UK, to evaluate national progress.
3. The Concordat Action plan comprises many cross-University initiatives. The coordination of the Concordat action plan lies with the Research Environment Group (REG) chaired by Professor Edward Duncan, Associate Dean for Research, Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport. REG has a strong cross-faculty academic and professional service representation to assure interlinking with other staff support initiatives. To ensure that the principles of the Concordat are embedded across the institution at a strategic level REG membership includes the Deputy Principal for Research, the institutional deans for Research Engagement and Performance (Dean REP), and for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (Dean EDI) and two faculty research leads, referred to as Associate Deans for Research. Prof Rachel Norman (Dean REP) is the nominated senior manager champion. REG reports to the University Research Committee (URC) and REG members are also representatives on Faculty Research Committees and/or on ECR /Fixed Term Contract Researchers fora to ensure wide-ranging dissemination of activities.
4. The Concordat action plan builds on the University's HR Excellence in Research award action plan. The University of Stirling initially received the HR Excellence in Research Award in 2011 and has consistently retained it following subsequent biennial external reviews.
5. The first two-year Concordat action plan (October 2021- October 2023) was developed to specifically benefit and support early career researchers defined *as those who are new post-docs to those transitioning to or establishing independence*.

**Strategic Objectives and progress to date**

1. The Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS), consultation with REG and the wider Uni community and building on past HR Excellence in Research action plan informed our strategic objectives and identified several key areas of focus:

*8.1 Support for Early Career Researchers*

* Development of an Achieving Success form that reflects the successes and timeframes specifically of contract researchers to promote consistency in conducting and embed career development discussions. This is now available for all Faculties and REG is currently developing a video resource to accompany the achieving success paperwork to support its implementation.

*8.2 Environment & Culture*

* The third round of the Research Culture Awards were held in May 2022 during the annual Festival of Research. The awards are an opportunity to celebrate people, groups and initiatives which positively contribute to a vibrant research environment at Stirling. The Research Awards have gained momentum with the number of people nominating increasing from 63 in 2020 to 141 in 2022 and the number of nominations increasing from 125 to 244 respectively.
* Approval of the new *Mental Health Strategy 2021-24* and roll out of mental health & wellbeing programme for line managers.
* Work on defining and delivering on the University’s commitment to deliver 10 days professional development is ongoing. A discussion paper has been developed and will be aligned with work being conducted within IAS. REG will continue to address this action in year two of our Action Plan.

*8.3*  *Professional and Career Development*

* Incorporation of tailored research specific leadership and research project management training for managers of researchers as a core part of the IAS Researcher Development Programme. The pilot programme in 2021/22 was fully subscribed with a 5-star rating and 100% recommend rate and will feature in 2022/23 and beyond.
* The firstprofessorial colloquium was hosted during Festival of Research 2022. This event was open to all researchers with co-creation focussing on “*research culture: an opportunity to do things differently*”. Two further events are planned for 2022/2023 as an opportunity for senior staff to share good practice. The value of these community of practice events will be captured in a post event evaluation survey and outcomes/future initiatives shared via blog pieces.
  1. *Social culture, identity and engagement*
* Development of a UniversityInduction Guide for research staff to support an enhanced induction process (Appendix 1). Since October 2020 inductions for research staff have been hosted twice-yearly by the Institute for Advanced Studies (IAS) and dedicated resources have been developed to welcome new staff at any point of entry during the course of the year and are hosted on the IAS Research Staff Canvas page. A significant increase has been seen in participation since implementation (60% attendance rates AY 2021/22, 25% AY 2020/21). A positive impact of these dedicated events has been a greater engagement with Research, Innovation and Business Engagement (RIBE) for funding related support. Furthermore, RIBE presents at the University-wide twice-yearly inductions as a forum to raise awareness of in-house researcher support, REG activity and the Concordat. The effectiveness of this tool and experiences relating to a more robust induction process will be captured in CEDARS which will run in Spring 2023.
* Improved opportunities to contribute to institutional policy development through an increase in membership of contract researchers and ECRs on Faculty Committees, University Research Committee, Institutional Committees and working groups. REG membership has been strengthened to include 3 early career researchers allowing for REG work to link into early career networks and communicate more effectively with postdoctoral fora.

Full details are outlined in Appendix 2: Concordat Action Plan*.* Updates on plans have been shared with the researcher community via University Research Committee, cascading of information from REG colleagues to Faculty Research Committees and ECR networks and via the Research Bites blog series, University-wide staff newsletter, and the creation of talking head resources on our internal website.

**Learning from progress and Future Plans**

1. REG has established itself as an inclusive and engaged forum which actively works to improve the research environment of the University. To ensure broad representation and maximise dissemination of activities via local networks REG has developed a strong cross-Faculty academic representation of 12 research-active staff members. It has welcomed two new early career researchers AY 2021/22 (a Research Fellow and Postdoctoral Research Fellow). Furthermore, in the last year a chair-vice chair structure has been established for succession planning purposes. Subgroups were created to coordinate the delivery of key year 1 REG activities. Each working group was led by at least two REG members, with further participation drawn from within REG or across the University. This model of engagement has proven highly successful in delivering key actions and in enabling wider participation of staff from across the University in developing the university research environment and research culture.
2. This first two-year action plan was drafted mid-2020 and we are cognisant of the need to continue to engage with the researcher community to gain an understanding of the current challenges and opportunities faced and to adapt the action plan accordingly. Opportunities for new activities will be addressed and prioritised as appropriate.
3. Co-creation of new initiatives can take considerable time to develop, coordinate and embed. While a two-year plan is helpful in monitoring progress it is less so in tracking impact in the medium-long term. It is necessary to a) have a wider vision for achievement, and b) factor in contingency time for action implementation and evaluation of impact.
4. REG are currently developing cross-University action focused sub-groups to deliver on key year two actions:
   1. CEDARS will run Spring 2023 as part of our ongoing commitment to report on and seek to improve the quality of the research environment.
   2. To raise the profile of Research Culture across the institution via the establishment of a Research Culture Network and series of events. This will be led by Prof Rachel Norman with support from RIBE, REG and the wider researcher community.
   3. To develop a new information resource – the Researcher Guide - for Research Staff and PIs to navigate policies, roles, and expectations.
   4. To develop guidance on recruitment, promotion and career advancement ensuring that guidance is unambiguous against the inappropriate use of publication metrics and advice on the use of a wide range of research outputs.
   5. To raise awareness of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) via the creation of a guide to responsible research assessment, with specific training on “*responsible and fair research assessment and what does it mean for me.*”
   6. To provide support for senior research colleagues via delivery of two further Professorial Colloquia as an opportunity to explore ways to strengthen research teams and capacity build for future research generations.
   7. To enable researchers to pursue 10 days or more days of CPD per year, defining what constitutes 10 days of CPD, how to empower researchers to tailor their 10 days to suit their needs and how engagement can be maximised for the benefit of researchers and their careers.

13. From June REG will begin developing the next action plan, which will move to a 3-year cycle spanning 2023-2027 in accordance with the HR Excellence in Research process as managed by Vitae. Through the new action plan we will continue to increase the quality of the research environment placing equality, diversity, and inclusion as core values underpinning all activity. The recent REF Equality Diversity Advisory Panel report will influence activity in this regard.

**Resource Implications**

1. University wide initiatives and events contained in the action plan are within existing resource.

**Equality Considerations**

1. The University is fully committed to promoting equality and diversity in all aspects of our research activities. The Concordat action plan is a further demonstration of the University’s commitment to the equality agenda, with particular reference to researchers.

**Strategic Contribution**

1. The Concordat establishes a set of principles by which research activities are conducted, aligned and evaluated contributing to the development of a positive research culture.

**Recommendations**

1. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

**USPG Sponsor**

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Appendix 1: [Induction Guide for Research Staff](https://canvas.stir.ac.uk/courses/5106/pages/welcome)

Appendix 2: Concordat Action Plan Year 1 Progress Summary