

Context and Objectives

The University of Edinburgh became a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers in February 2020. In total, an 18-month consultation process took place (October 2019 to March 2021), focussed on how to embed the principles of the Concordat at the university. The consultation took place with different staff groups including researchers, managers and professional services staff who work with and support researchers. The University of Edinburgh's Concordat Action Plan was developed out of this consultation and published in March 2021¹. Prior to publication, a draft of the action plan was submitted to the Research Policy Group (now Research Strategy Group), responsible for overseeing, directing and monitoring research strategy, policy and integrity matters, and the Executive Committee, for review and comment.

The University's Strategy 2030 has four key areas and 'People' is one of these areas, with the commitment; *'We will value the contribution of every individual, regardless of whether they are students, staff, alumni or other contributors. We will support each other's development and career progress'*. The Concordat Action Plan is a significant step in this area.

The Institute for Academic Development (IAD)² lead on progressing the Concordat at Edinburgh, with support from an implementation group to ensure broad representation from across the University. The Concordat Implementation Group (CIG) was formed in March 2020 and includes representation from staff who support postdocs, Human Resources, Edinburgh Research Office, Library Research Support Team, academics, Research Staff Societies representatives and Postdoc Champions³. The CIG continues to meet twice a year to track progress and implementation of our action plan. Progress against our signatory responsibilities can be found on our Concordat webpage⁴

The University of Edinburgh's Action Plan focuses on setting up more robust structures and clearer support for researchers, improving communication, simplifying support in a complex organisation and making it easier for researchers to access and engage in support and career development. These all aim to create a more supportive and positive research environment for our researchers. The plan was also developed during the pandemic, a time when we all had to significantly adapt our support and priorities. We factored these substantial changes to our learning and research environment into our action plan with the creation of more online support – resources, guides and videos – and improved communication around this.

Implementation Plan

The extensive consultation process supported a case for approval of four short-term secondment projects, based at the IAD, working on different areas of the action plan, via funding from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Adaptation and Renewal Team (ART) funding.

The four projects ran for six months, from January-July 2021, and included:

1. Development of a Research Staff Hub web resource
2. Development and enhancement of our Career Development resources
3. Development of a Managers of research staff online resource
4. Better understanding our research staff population

Outputs from some secondments are now available for research staff and their managers to access, with others continuing and in development.

Implementation of the action plan is an ongoing, collaborative process. We encourage researchers, research managers, or any other staff group with an interest in the Concordat, to feedback on what they think the University should be doing. Feedback is also regularly sought and received from our CIG, our researchers, via the Research Staff

¹http://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/iad/Researchers/Research_staff/University_of_Edinburgh_Concordat_Action_Plan_2021_2023.pdf

² <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development>

³ <https://www.ed.ac.uk/researchers/school-college-discipline-resources/school-college-resources>

⁴ <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/research-roles/research-only-staff/advice/concordat/concordat>

Societies, and our Postdoc Champions, and updates on Concordat progress is regularly included in our monthly newsletter, twitter feed and IAD4Reserachers blog⁵. The IAD held meetings throughout June 2021 with key contacts in Schools/Colleges to update on Concordat progress and plans, and to receive feedback. IAD also reports to our senior University committee - The Research Strategy Group.

Outcomes/Progress of UoE Action Plan

We are confident that researchers are now aware of, and engaging in, support across the university through the creation of the Research Staff Hub (RSH)⁶. The RSH is a website that supports communication and coordination of the vast support available to all researchers at the University of Edinburgh, and those who support them.

The site was designed to present information to a research staff member asking a particular question or addressing a situation, rather than based around the university structure, university services and/or their provision. The process of creating the web space included a draft site that was shared widely for comments and feedback over a period of four months and refined based on the comments received over that period. Since its launch in June 2021, the site has had 11,560 page views.

New and enhanced career development resources⁷ are now available at the University. A series of recorded career conversations have been created, with people who have transitioned from university research positions to careers outside of academia, along with a suite of micro workshops, based on materials drawn from already successful live workshop sessions. The micro workshops are open access, accessible and available to researchers at any time.

To support managers of researchers an existing face to face course is currently being developed into an online resource with content that will be openly available to all Principal Investigators (PIs)/Managers at the University. The course aims to ensure that all PIs and staff in management roles across the University are appropriately equipped and trained with respect to the management and development of their staff and are knowledgeable about the policies and procedures necessary for recruitment, development, and management of their teams, as well as Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training. Improved support for PIs also exists with a dedicated section 'Resources for Managers' (766 page views since June 2021) on the RSH, a new guide around PI Career Conversations, and the RSH itself being a resource that PIs/Managers of Researchers can use in discussions with their research staff.

A secondment project, which carried out research into research staff coming to the end of their contract, has been extended until December 2022. This extension allows the continuation of this research and attention on new projects focussed on creating robust support for staff on fixed-term contracts, supporting re-deployment practices within the University, improved awareness of long-term research staff and work into destination data.

Other actions have also been achieved since we launched our action plan, and these are listed in our Year 1 action plan reporting. All new initiatives are added to the RSH as they develop. Recent additions to highlight include:

- a new postdoc champion role descriptor
- information for researchers on how to use the 10 days professional development
- information on using online profiles through PURE
- new leadership stories
- piloting leadership coaching and training for researcher representatives
- updates around funding support.

Measures of Success

The collegial approach we've taken with the Concordat has been integral to our successes and supported the

⁵ <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/research-roles/research-only-staff/news>

⁶ www.ed.ac.uk/researchers

⁷ <https://www.ed.ac.uk/researchers/career-development/resources>

systems and resources we've set up. Committees have been an instrumental way to support these developments, receive feedback and work together.

Through the RSH, research staff are now more aware of the breadth of support available to them in their research, career development and employment at the University, supporting a positive research culture. They are now inputting into university level Concordat projects and supporting and attending University committees. Societies are leading on support during Postdoc Appreciation Week and one College has now set up a Research Staff Committee with representation from all of their postdoc societies and others supporting research staff, they've also created a local action plan and a website for tailored College specific research staff support, complementing the Research Staff Hub.

More Schools across the university are appointing a named lead for the Postdoc Champion role, as they acknowledge the benefit of such a role to support and encourage postdocs/research staff to connect with School and wider university initiatives. This also creates a mechanism for receiving feedback from researchers and champions on what research staff are accessing and wanting, to support their career development.

We've seen a significant increase in our careers offer over the last two years, with the appointment of a dedicated Research Staff Careers Consultant, new career resources and the RSH being a conduit of information to direct researchers to.

The structure and themes of our current action plan has allowed us to work with different colleagues across the university, to include more local level initiatives and to focus on specific actions.

Looking forward

We've made great progress with our two year action plan and our focus is to continue to progress our actions and identify new developments and opportunities related to sector developments. This is supported by our membership on several Scottish and National level committees, with staff who also work in researcher development and work on the Concordat.

We aim to start working on training and support for interdisciplinary researchers, providing more support around mentoring partnerships and building on our successful coaching pilot delivered in summer 2021. We are in working groups focussed on Narrative CVs and are working closely with the new university Research Culture Working Group to identify priority areas/themes and support their action plan development, ensuring it aligns with other initiatives and action plans.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges we face with the Concordat is around communication. The size, complexity and devolved nature of the University requires carefully planned and targeted promotion about Concordat progress and developments to ensure that it is embedded in all areas and we are moving forward with it. We will carry on updating our Communication and Marketing Team to ensure Concordat progress and outputs are included in the University Bulletin updates, and continue the close connection with the CIG and the Postdoc Champions, to support progress and development of our action plan.