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| **Name of Institution** | University of Stirling |
| **Reporting period** | Jan 2024-Jan 2025 |
| **Date approved by governing body** | [date] |
| **Date published online** | [date] |
| **Web address of annual report** | [insert action plan web address] |
| **Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage** | <https://www.stir.ac.uk/research/concordat-and-hr-excellence-in-research/> |
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| **Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via rdc@sfc.ac.uk** | [insert date sent to secretariat] |

## 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 Stirling’s [Strategic Plan 2030](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/strategic-plan/#d.en.177018), places excellence in [research](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/strategic-plan/research/) and innovation and a focus on our [staff](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/strategic-plan/staff/) and their career and skills development at the heart of our strategic priorities. Our commitment to “producing world-leading research and innovation with national and global impact” is underpinned by a strong research culture - one that fosters curiosity, creativity, and collaboration across our research community and teams. Equally, our strategic focus on staff reflects our dedication to “enabling colleagues to develop and sustain fulfilling careers while delivering our ambitions individually and collectively.”  The successful delivery of our strategy is underpinned by several enabling strategies, including our Research and Innovation Strategy and People Strategy. These strategies ensure that research culture is embedded in all people-related initiatives and provide a structured approach to assessing and enhancing the research environment.  Our commitment to research culture is further demonstrated through:   * Implementation of the **Researcher Development Concordat,** ensuring robust support for researcher career progression. * Our colleague-led **Research Environment Group (REG)**, which aligns strategic people initiatives with the Concordat. * Our **Athena Swan Action Plan**, with the University awarded Silver at institutional level in 2024 * Our commitment to the **Research Integrity Concordat,** reinforcing the highest standards of research ethics and integrity * Our commitment to **DORA,** promoting fair and responsible research evaluation.   The [Concordat Action Plan](https://www.stir.ac.uk/research/concordat-and-hr-excellence-in-research/) (2023–26), approved by University Court, is a key mechanism for embedding a positive, diverse, and inclusive research culture. The plan supports all research-active staff, with a particular focus on Early Career Researchers (ECRs) - defined as new postdoctoral researchers or those transitioning to or establishing independence. Recognising the varied nature of research careers, we empower colleagues to self-identify with the career stage that best aligns with their experience and aspirations.  We actively encourage all members of our research community to shape and strengthen our research culture through Research Culture Conversations, staff surveys, and faculty-level engagement forums. A key mechanism for this is ‘Be Heard’, our institutional approach to gathering and responding to staff feedback. This engagement approach ensures that research staff, alongside all colleagues, have a structured platform to share their experiences, voice their needs, and influence positive change. Insights from ‘Be Heard’ directly inform our policies and initiatives, reinforcing our commitment to an evolving researcher-focused environment where all staff can thrive.  A key pillar of our commitment to fostering a positive and inclusive research culture is our Research Culture Awards. The continued success and growth of these awards reflect the strong engagement and appreciation among colleagues for the importance of research culture and its impact across the institution.  As a flagship event in the University calendar, the Awards have seen a 2.5-fold increase in nominations since 2020, reflecting growing engagement and recognition of research culture. They provide valuable insights into lived experiences, highlight best practices, and recognise contributions across all roles and career stages.  Through the Research Culture Awards, we gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of researchers, highlight what is most valued, share best practices, and celebrate contributions across all roles and career stages. This initiative plays a crucial role in embedding a collaborative, supportive, and thriving research culture at the University of Stirling. |
| **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)***  The 2023-26 Researcher Development Concordat action plan encourages ambition, evidence-building, and impact. It is aspirational, shows progression, and includes specific actions addressing contract researchers' needs. Whilst the Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan has a focus on research staff (inclusive of research assistants, postdoctoral research fellows and senior research fellows), to be in alignment with the focus of the Researcher Development Concordat, we have agreed that our action plan will continue to encompass actions to benefit the wider researcher community at the University of Stirling.    The action plan aligns with key institutional strategies (Institutional Strategic Plan, Research & Innovation Strategy, People Strategy) and sector initiatives (Athena Swan, Concordat to Support Research Integrity). The Researcher Development Concordat principles underline the institution’s commitment towards the recruitment, retention and development of our research community. The implementation of the action plan is a tool through which we will support the ambition and delivery of these strategies.  **Environment and Culture**  Under the Environment & Culture principle, the University leads 15 actions (1-15) and co-leads the BA Early Career Network (Scotland), fostering SHAPE research staff development. This initiative has grown to be the most successful BA ECR Hub to date regarding membership numbers.  Our Research Culture Champions Network is a diverse community of colleagues from all faculties and career stages, dedicated to fostering a positive and inclusive research culture. Through Research Culture Conversations, they engage in open, collaborative discussions that co-create solutions for meaningful change. These sessions, open to all with an interest in research culture, explore a wide range of topics relevant to the research environment and culture.  By facilitating these conversations, we are building a shared understanding of research culture and strengthening a collective commitment to continuous improvement. This initiative has been a significant step towards developing an institutional community of practice, where colleagues exchange best practices and drive impactful cultural change. We remain committed to expanding and enhancing this Network as a platform for engagement, innovation, and shared learning.  **Employment**  Under the Employment principle, the University has 8 actions (16-23), including the piloting of narrative CVs for key positions (Chair/Vice Chair of REG, Professorial and PGR representatives on University Research committee). A series of workshops on narrative CVs have been well-received.  Researcher and Induction Guides, co-created with research staff and professional services, provide essential support for new researchers and Principal Investigators. Developed under our 2021–23 action plan, the Induction Guide includes a checklist of key policies, roles, and opportunities, while the Researcher Guide helps new staff and PIs navigate institutional expectations. Both guides are disseminated through multiple channels, integrated into induction events, and updated annually to ensure relevance and accessibility.  **Professional Development**  For Professional Development of Researchers (Actions 24-29), key elements of the Researcher Development Programme (RDP) include:   * A twofold increase in Research Staff engagement (44% in 2023/24 vs. 20% in 2022/23). * Expansion of 1-2-1 coaching due to high demand, with 90% of places filled by ECRs. * A Research Integrity ‘train-the-trainer’ workshop, leading to faculty-hosted sessions with positive feedback. * Increased engagement in the Supervisory stream, recognized as good practice in the January 2024 QESR report. * Coaching sessions tailored for PGRs, ECRs, and MCRs. * A CPD for Research Staff Guidance document detailing CPD activities and resources, discussed at a Research Culture Conversation (Nov 2024) and set for further development and dissemination.   Impact measurement methods include institutional pulse survey on research culture, aligning with strategic initiatives, informal qualitative feedback from Research Conversation sessions and institutional events. |
| **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)***  Significant progress has been made in advancing the Environment and Culture, with key initiatives strengthening our institutional approach to fostering a positive, inclusive and supportive research culture. **Research Culture Conversations**: this popular researcher-led series has continued, providing an open forum for discussions on research culture and including experts from across the institution. Seven sessions were held in 2023-24, and to date, three sessions have been held in 2024-25. These conversations are a catalyst for cultural change, fostering collective engagement and shared ownership of research culture across career stages. ***(Institution, Academic Managers, PIs, Researchers)***  **Research Culture Awards**: These awards aim to celebrate collegiality, collaboration, and role modelling - reinforcing a shared institutional understanding of the values and behaviours expected at Stirling. The impact of this initiative extends beyond the awards themselves. Professor Rachel Norman (Faculty of Natural Sciences) and Claire Bradley (RIBE) co-authored a journal article ‘Key features of a positive research culture – a qualitative analysis of award nominations’ based on data from the Research Culture Awards. Their findings were also presented at the 2024 Vitae International Researcher Development Conference, further establishing Stirling as a sector leader in research culture. ***(Institution, Academic Managers, PIs, Researchers)***  **Strengthening Research Integrity**: there has been considerable activity around this topic. The upcoming Due Diligence in Research & Innovation Policy & Framework, launching in early 2025, will provide a structured approach to safeguarding responsible research practices across the University. ***(Institution, PIs, Researchers)***  **Pulse surveys:** A research culture-focused pulse survey is in development to deepen insights into key areas identified in the CEDARS 2021 and 2023 surveys. This initiative will provide enhanced, real-time data on how staff perceive specific aspects of research culture, enabling targeted interventions and continuous improvement. ***(Institution, PIs, Researchers)***  **Institutional People Strategy**: Our newly approved People Strategy recognises that our dedicated people are key to our success. It focusses on three main themes: (1) how do we **attract** the right talent to the University, (2) how do we **engage** staff in shaping their experience at work, and (3) how do we provide opportunities for our people to develop and **grow.** The Strategy reinforces our commitment to supporting early career staff in their development and progression within the University. To ensure accountability and impact, progress reporting will include specific data on research staff, enabling targeted actions that strengthen career pathways and enhance the overall research environment. ***(Institution, Academic Managers, Researchers)***  **Inclusion:** In 2023, our ‘Be Heard’ EDI data collection exercise significantly improved equality characteristic disclosure rates, supporting a more inclusive and data-informed approach to research culture. ***(Institution, Academic Managers, Researchers)***  **Health & Wellbeing:** The University has strengthened health and wellbeing support for all staff, including researchers, through external partnerships (e.g., Peppy) and a Mental Health First Aid training programme. A data review is now underway to ensure maximum impact of this investment and optimal support for research staff. ***(Institution, Academic Managers, Researchers)***  A new **HR&OD Sharepoint site** provides key information to support managers of researchers navigate institutional policy e.g. Respect at Work and Study policy. There is also specific guidance regarding Academic Promotions, Achieving Success and links for relevant training/resources. This site had over 10,000 visits in the first three months following launch (Nov 2024-Jan 2025) (***PIs, Researchers)*** |
| **Employment *(max 600 words)***  Significant progress has been made against the actions in relation to the Employment, strengthening institutional support for research careers and enhancing professional development opportunities across stakeholder groups.  **Narrative CV:** a series of workshops have been delivered using an external facilitator and internal presenters to provide information and practical support to researchers in developing Narrative CVs for external grant applications. These workshops provided practical guidance, peer review opportunities, and hands-on drafting sessions. Additionally, the Narrative CV approach has been trialled in the internal recruitment processes for the Vice-Chair/Chair role of the Research Environment Group (REG) and the new professorial and PGR representatives on the University Research Committee. ***(PIs, Researchers)***  To help with new staff induction, **RIBE-led research focussed induction events** are now offered to all new research staff twice per academic year; professional services colleagues, including RIBE, also participate in the institutional induction/welcome events which are open to all new staff, ensuring research staff received tailored support from the beginning of their time at the University.***(Researchers)***  **People Strategy**: the newly approved People Strategy details our commitment to developing an agile and consistent approach to recognising contribution, with a strong focus on skills development. As part of this, dedicated Achieving Success sessions have been delivered to both reviewers and reviewees, reinforcing best-practice in feedback and development conversations. ***(Institution, Academic Managers, PIs, Researchers***  The **Recognition Award Scheme (RAS)** celebrates the commitment of colleagues whose exceptional work contributes to the delivery of strategic objectives and overall success of the University. To support line managers in drafting impactful nominations, briefing sessions on RAS were held in June 2024, and a recording also made available on the RAS Sharepoint site. ***(PIs, Researchers)***  **Research Leadership** provision is included in the RDP including coaching skills, project management and a range of sessions to cover a breadth of leadership-relevant skills. The Stirling Crucible is targeted at ECRs and is an intensive leadership programme designed to stimulate interdisciplinary collaboration, facilitate the building of active networks of researchers across the University and beyond, and grow individual researchers’ creativity, innovation and confidence in working with others to generate research with real world impact. Further developments include a pilot of a Leadership 101 programme led by HR&OD to support emerging research leaders. ***(PIs, Researchers)***  These initiatives demonstrate tangible progress in enhancing employment conditions, career development, and leadership opportunities for researchers at Stirling. Ongoing efforts will focus on scaling successful interventions, embedding best practices, and ensuring inclusive access to development opportunities across all career stages. |
| **Professional development *(max 600 words)***  The University of Stirling continues to embed robust and inclusive professional development opportunities, ensuring researchers at all career stages have access to high-quality training, mentorship, leadership opportunities, and enterprise engagement. Future priorities include scaling successful initiatives, embedding new mentoring schemes, and strengthening interdisciplinary leadership pathways.  **Mentoring Platform:** A new mentoring platform has been procured, with initial scoping completed by HR&OD. This enhanced approach will provide structured mentoring opportunities for researchers at all career stages, supporting their professional growth, career progression, and leadership development. The platform will deliver enhanced reporting on mentoring engagement, enabling targeted support or promotion of mentoring to key groups of research staff if required. The scheme is set to launch in 2024–25. ***(Academic Managers, PIs, Researchers)***  **Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise** information and awareness raising activities have taken place with the Enterprise Programme of events targeted at research staff. Since August 2023 there have been 64 events open to all staff. These events have included workshops, discussion panels, open houses, and social/networking sessions. There have been focussed sessions on **Knowledge Transfer Partnerships** (KTP) and on knowledge exchange. A KTP is a collaborative project between a partner organisation, a university, and a recent graduate. The goal of a KTP is to help businesses grow and innovate by using the UK's knowledge base. The institution is currently hosting three KTPs, each of which is aligned to the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal, in which Stirling is a delivery partner, and a fourth application will be submitted in early 2025. Further development of KTP activities and embedding Enterprise training in skills programmes is included in forward plans. ***(Academic Managers, Researchers)***  There has been considerable enhancement of the **Researcher Development Programme** (RDP) for research staff, with 20 new topic sessions/series. A significant increase in engagement was seen in 2023-24 with 233 individuals engaging in the RDP, up from 117 the previous year, and 547 attendances compared to 219. The total number of research active staff engaging equates to 44% of total staff population (up from 20% the previous year). The increase in engagement was seen across all research career stages**. *(Researchers)***  Investment in the new 1-2-1 coaching for Research Staff, introduced in 2023-24, has been highly popular and due to demand has been expanded into 2024-2025. 90% of places offered were for ECRs in 2023/24. ***(Researchers)***  Provision of a train the trainer **Research Integrity** workshop with UKRIO aimed to embed discussions about research integrity across faculties and to harness local networks, with participants hosting workshops in their faculty within the same AY. Half of participants successfully delivered a workshop with positive feedback from colleagues. ***(PIs, Researchers)***  The stream of the RDP for **Doctoral Supervisors** has seen an increase in the number of supervisory staff engaged with the programme, both in terms of live sessions and on-demand provision and has led to the development of a strong community of practice. There has been a significant enhancement of the programme with 5 new topic sessions added to the 14-part programme in 2023-2024 (3 of which specifically targeting experienced supervisors), with a total of 17 peer-led discussion sessions in the 2024-25 programme. On-demand training for all supervisors, from those in the early stages of supervision, to those wishing to refresh knowledge to meet professional development requirements, is available via an online modular course from *Epigeum*, part of SAGE Publishing.  This stream of Supervisory provision was highlighted as an example of good practice in the [January 2024 QESR report](https://chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https:/www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/university-of-stirling-qesr-23.pdf). **(PIs, researchers)**  The **Stirling Crucible programme** continues to develop and grow. This programme, a series of three 2-day labs runs on alternate years for ECR staff, was created by University of Stirling’s researchers, and now has a steering group of alumni and professional services staff. The Steering Group have responsibility for developing the programme each year and has recently recruited to its 6th cohort which will run in 2025. ***(Researchers)*** |
| **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)*** |
| The activities undertaken over this reporting period have provided valuable insights into the areas of strength and areas for improvement in our institutional approach to supporting researchers and research culture.  A key lesson learned is the importance of targeted engagement strategies. For instance, the engagement with the Research Culture Conversations and the increased participation in our Researcher Development Programme (RDP) demonstrate that accessible, well-promoted, and researcher-driven initiatives resonate strongly with our community. However, feedback from participants has highlighted the need for even greater personalisation of development offerings, especially for those identifying as ECRs. To address this, we will refine our mentoring provision by introducing a new approach to mentoring at the University, aligning with our Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) objectives. Additionally, we will explore more flexible, personalised training pathways within the RDP.  Another critical message is the significance of integrating mechanisms for feedback into ongoing activities. Pulse surveys have provided valuable insights, but their findings indicate a need for more frequent, informal feedback opportunities. In response, we will implement real-time feedback tools during events and introduce periodic focus groups to ensure our programmes remain aligned with researcher needs and expectations.  Additionally, while the introduction of narrative CV support has been well-received, feedback indicates that more extensive training and peer-review opportunities would be beneficial to ensure broader confidence and understanding of the format. We will refine our training offer by incorporating structured peer-review sessions and additional support resources, ensuring broader uptake and proficiency.  Whilst engagement metrics have improved overall, a particular challenge has been maintaining engagement with contract researchers. Feedback highlights that this group often feels disconnected from broader institutional initiatives. To address this, we will explore more flexible and inclusive ways of engaging contract researchers, such as virtual mentoring sessions, asynchronous workshops, and tailored communication strategies.  Modifications to our measures of success will include disaggregating engagement data by career stage and contract type to provide more detailed insight into the reach of our activities enabling us to adjust and adapt to meet the needs of all researchers. Additionally, we will strengthen our impact evaluation by showcasing case studies and testimonials, highlighting tangible benefits and fostering a stronger sense of community and shared purpose.  In summary, our key lessons include the importance of tailoring initiatives to diverse researcher needs, embedding robust and continuous feedback mechanisms, and enhancing engagement with underrepresented groups. These insights will directly inform refinements to our action plan, ensuring it remains responsive, impactful, and aligned with institutional and researcher priorities. |
| **Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period**  ***(max 500 words)*** |
| In the 2025-26 reporting period, our key objectives will focus on aligning our activities with the newly launched Research & Innovation Strategy and People Strategy and strengthening delivery under the three pillars of the Researcher Development Concordat: environment and culture, employment, and professional development as follows.  Environment and Culture:   1. Expand the Research Culture Conversations series by introducing thematic workshops that address specific challenges identified through community discussion and feedback via the research culture pulse survey. 2. Strengthen our Research Culture Champions Network, ensuring representation from all faculties and career stages, with a focus on ECRs and contract researchers. 3. Launch the institutional Due Diligence in Research & Innovation Policy & Framework.   Employment:   1. Scaling the provision of guidance and support for use of narrative CVs in external grant applications by embedding training into the Researcher Development Programmes and providing advanced workshops for research leaders. 2. Continuing to collaborate with colleagues from across the University to enhance induction experiences for research staff by further integrating resources such as the Researcher Guide and Induction Guide into onboarding processes. 3. Launch an institutional ‘Leadership 101’ programme which will provide all staff, including early and mid-career researchers, with development against key leadership skills. This will be an opportunity for research staff to engage in broader leadership development beyond research-specific pathways. This will complement existing programmes such as the Stirling Crucible, whilst also enabling research staff to build leadership networks with peers in non-research roles – fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and wider institutional perspectives.   Professional Development:   1. Launch the new mentoring platform. 2. Expand the 1-2-1 coaching programme available via the Researcher Development Programme, ensuring equitable access for researchers at all career stages. 3. Introduce additional topics to the Supervisory Stream of the RDP, enhancing provision for experienced supervisors and addressing feedback from participants. 4. Strengthen our Knowledge Exchange activities by increasing awareness of initiatives such as Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) and enterprise-focused training.   These objectives will be underpinned by robust evaluation frameworks, including data analysis from surveys, qualitative feedback from focus groups, and tracking engagement metrics. Through these actions, we aim to continue to build a thriving research culture, support researcher career progression, and enhance institutional capacity for innovation and impact. |
| **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)***   The report document was drafted, then agreed by the REG Chair, the Executive Director of RIBE, and the Deputy Principal (Research & Innovation). The document was then submitted for approval at University Court, first via University Strategy & Policy Group (USPG), and then Joint Policy, Planning & Resources Committee (JPPRC). The official sponsor of the report document was the Deputy Principal (Research & Innovation), Professor Paul Townsend.   This report follows a rigorous internal approval process to ensure alignment with institutional priorities and compliance with external reporting requirements.  This review process ensures that the report is comprehensive, accurate, and reflective of institutional commitments to the Researcher Development Concordat. The final version is approved by the Chair of University Court and submitted to Universities UK, the secretariat for the Researcher Development Concordat. Contact details are provided for any queries. |

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 [rdc@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:rdc@sfc.ac.uk) [www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk](http://www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk)