

Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Name of Institution	[Heriot-Watt University]
Reporting period	[2023-2024]
Date approved by governing body	University Committee for Research and Innovation (UCRI): January 2025 University Executive (UE): February 2025 University Court: March 2025
Date published online	[March 2025]
Web address of annual report	[HR Excellence in Research and Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers - Heriot-Watt University (hw.ac.uk)]
Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	[HR Excellence in Research and Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers - Heriot-Watt University (hw.ac.uk)]
Contact for questions/concerns on researcher career development	[ResearchFutures@hw.ac.uk]
Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk	[March 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)

Heriot-Watt University (HWU) is committed to fostering a research culture that is inclusive, collaborative, and supportive, ensuring researchers at all career stages thrive in a positive environment. Central to this commitment is building a global, collegial community that values diversity, engagement, and innovation.

Our approach aligns with our **Strategy 2025: “Shaping Tomorrow Together”**, which prioritises “Excelling in Research and Enterprise”. This strategy emphasises research excellence and societal impact. During 2023-2024, our efforts to create, maintain and embed an enterprising, positive and inclusive research culture have focused on co-production and consultative engagement with our research community, ensuring that the Concordat principles are aligned with the research culture action plan and the needs of a diverse and globally connected university population.

The Research Culture Action Plan, launched in June 2024, focuses on five strategic objectives (SOs): **Collegiality, Research Integrity, Research Careers, Research Recognition, and Open Research**. It seeks to address critical issues such as community building, workload balance, clear communication, and systemic career development support. Collaboration with the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) team and alignment with the **HWU Athena Swan Action Plan** ensures that underrepresented groups are supported, further promoting equity and inclusion across all research activities.

Insights from consultations, surveys, and workshops across our campuses informed actionable steps to maintain an inclusive culture. **School-level research strategies** are closely aligned with Strategy 2025 and the Research Culture Action Plan, ensuring consistency and continuous improvement. Monitoring and implementation are supported by a professional partnering approach, that brings together academic, research and professional services leadership to sustain delivery and maintain alignment of resources with our strategic objectives.

A significant initiative is the establishment of the **Research Futures Hub**, designed to support the career development of Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) and Early Career Researchers (ECRs). The hub aims to provide a structured framework to enhance career progression, foster networking, and ensure an equitable experience throughout the PGR lifecycle, from admission to graduation.

Community-driven initiatives launched in 2023 - 2024 are integral to sustaining an inclusive research environment. Dedicated roles such as the **Associate Principal for Research Culture and People and the Researcher Development Consultants**, play a pivotal role in advancing this agenda. These efforts are planned to be supported by a strategic allocation of SFC Research

Excellence Grant funding, to implement impactful initiatives that enhance researcher well-being, recognise diverse contributions, and improve the overall research environment and career development of researchers.

Through these initiatives, Heriot-Watt University demonstrates its unwavering commitment to cultivating an inclusive, collaborative, and supportive research culture that enables all researchers to thrive and achieve excellence in their careers.

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*)

Heriot-Watt University's Research Culture Action Plan aligns its five strategic objectives with the three pillars of the Concordat. For each pillar, we will outline the key strategic objectives, detail the implementation approach, define progress measurement methods, and ensure stakeholder-centred delivery (Appendix 1).

Strategic Objectives for Pillar 1: Environment and Culture

1. Enhance Communication and awareness of Concordat Principles

Implementation: Strengthen the dissemination of Concordat principles via updated platforms like the Research Engagement Directorate SharePoint, HWU webpage and integrate them into Research Culture activities and inductions.

Measurement: Track engagement metrics through session attendance, feedback forms, and SharePoint/Web usage analytics.

2. Improve People Management and Training

Implementation: Expand access to training resources such as the "Role of People Manager" toolkit and promote the updated PDR workflow across schools.

Measurement: Evaluate staff participation rates in training programs and monitor improvements in PDR completion statistics.

3. Promote Equity and Representation

Implementation: Broaden representation in Research Culture working group, sub-groups and forums, enabling Early Career Researchers (ECRs) to shape actionable plans.

Measurement: Review participation diversity in forums and collect feedback through targeted surveys.

4. Foster Supportive and Inclusive Research Community

Implementation: Continue hosting regular Research Culture Cafés series and EDI-focused events while enhancing visibility of HR policies addressing workplace challenges. Having flexible timings of offerings to enable participation.

Measurement: Use participant feedback (e.g. Networks: LGBTQ+, Disability, Parents & Carers, STEM Inclusivity), policy access metrics, and survey outcomes (e.g., STEM Inclusivity Survey) to gauge success.

Strategic Objectives for Pillar 2: Employment

5. Clarify Promotion Processes and Career Pathways

Implementation: Conduct school-specific workshops and enhance transparency through updated descriptors and progression/promotion criteria.

Measurement: Collect feedback from workshop participants and analyse promotion success rates.

6. Enhance Induction Process across the University

Implementation: Deliver quarterly “Belong” welcome sessions, introduce monthly Professional Organisational Development (POD) workshops, keep the SharePoint hub updated, and automate ERP compliance reminders.

Measurement: Monitor session attendance, gather participant feedback, and evaluate completion rates for mandatory training.

7. Promote Research Excellence Recognition

Implementation: Host annual events like Research in Action Week and Research Integrity & Culture Week, fostering networking and showcasing diverse research achievements. In addition to HWU PRIME awards, Schools awards and Three Minute Thesis Competition (3MT®).

Measurement: Assess participation levels, collect feedback from attendees, and document collaborative outcomes from the events.

Strategic Objectives for Pillar 3: Professional Development of Researchers

8. Establish the Research Futures Hub

Implementation: Conduct dedicated career development series for PGRs and research staff, focus on the ‘PROSPER’ resources. Conduct workshops and share resources to address diverse career pathways.

Measurement: Track participation in career development series, evaluate feedback from ECRs, and monitor the adoption of PROSPER resources.

9. Develop a Mid-Senior Career Program

Implementation: Roll out a new mid-senior career program in 2025, supported by a dedicated Researcher Development Consultant. Including training on leadership, impact, and research integrity.

Measurement: Measure program participation, assess improvements in leadership competencies, and collect feedback on training effectiveness.

10. Engage the Research Community with the Professional Training Frameworks

Implementation: Promote the Professional Researcher Training Framework, offering structured pathways like ‘Investigate’, ‘Communicate’, ‘Apply’ and ‘Lead’ for researchers at different stages. Include networking and live sessions for community engagement.

Measurement: Track engagement metrics, collect participant feedback, and assess skill improvements based on pathway completions.	
11. Enhance Career Path Resources and Support Implementation: Update the HWU webpage to provide accessible resources showcasing career pathways and development opportunities. Implement <u>HWU British Sign Language Local Plan for 2024-2030</u> by expanding BSL information accessibility and providing interpreters for all RED training and Culture Café offerings. Measurement: Monitor webpage usage, user feedback, and the impact on career progression rates.	
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)	See attached table (Appendix 1)
Employment (max 600 words)	See attached table (Appendix 1)
Professional development (max 600 words)	See attached table (Appendix 1)
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>During this period, several lessons emerged from activities aimed at improving HWU's Research Culture as part of supporting the career development of researchers.</p> <p>Awareness of the Concordat and reporting has been promoted through the RC WG and closer collaboration with Academic Schools. The establishment of the new Research Futures Hub, particularly the Reference WG that will replace the 'Research Staff Forum', is expected to enhance engagement with the Concordat's principles among the PGR and ECR communities.</p> <p>The principles of the Concordat have been integrated into the RC action plan, leading to modifications based on community feedback.</p> <p>Research Culture Programme – at HWU has focused on enhancing RC through collaboration between various stakeholders. The RC Action Plan, with five strategic objectives (Collegiality, Research Integrity, Research Careers, Research Recognition, and Open Research), was co-created through consultations, focus groups, and workshops. Challenges such as engagement, cultural differences, and support structures were identified. An evaluation strategy led by the RC WG will assess progress of the RC Programme.</p> <p>As part of addressing these challenges, the new Professional Researcher Training Framework was launched offering a pathway-based approach, focusing on skills development in research, business, and policy.</p>	

This year, through consultations, focus groups, and surveys, we gathered feedback from our research community at various career stages and points in their HWU journey. We analysed their suggestions and identified the following areas of focus to enhance agency and engagement (2023 HWU Research and Enterprising Culture, HedWay Group Ltd, 2023 J.Napier HWU Research Culture Action Plan).

1. **People, Policies and Process:** Efforts to improve HWU's people policies include enhancing employee recognition, improving appraisals, tackling workplace bullying, conducting exit surveys, engaging short-term contract staff, connecting PhD students with future supervisors, introducing peer mentoring, and establishing confidential support for addressing working conditions and line management issues.
2. **Ways of Working:** Enhance collaboration by fostering academic-professional staff partnerships, promoting networking opportunities, interdisciplinary events, and shared-interest communities. Improve social and physical spaces, support inclusive initiatives, and scale best practices through institutional awards to strengthen HWU's RC.
3. **Support Processes and Systems:** Decentralise processes for tailored local support, prioritising grant applications through reinstating the Principal Investigator (PI) Development Programme. Enhance Schools research staff inductions, especially for ECRs, and reduce administrative burdens to free up time for research and support.
4. **Leadership:** Enhance senior leadership visibility through improved communication and presence at internal meetings/events/activities to boost morale and engagement. HWU aims to implement in the next year the mid-senior academic leaders programme (Grade 8+) by fostering inclusive research, enhancing leadership skills, teamwork, and research capacity and continues with the HWU Global Leadership programme which has now enrolled its second cohort.
5. **Research Strategy and Planning:** Review workload allocation policies, establish a workload model, and focus research bid strategies on quality over quantity for more effective time investment.

Our research community engagement model has been shared across the UK HEI sector via the publication (Napier, J., Armstrong, F., & Bastidas, C. (2024) 'Empowering a global community through co-production of a connected university research culture'. Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal, 11(3), 400-423.), enabling institutions to adopt best practices and adapt them to their specific contexts.

**Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period
(max 500 words)**

The main purpose in delivering the HWU's Concordat Action Plan 2025 will be to help enhance the RC experience of our Research Staff population and thereby contribute to the work we are undertaking to support researchers career development across the Institution. Key objectives will focus on the 3 pillars of the Concordat (Environment and Culture, Employment, and Professional Development of Researchers):

Environment and Culture

Our key objectives for fostering a supportive RC will focus on driving the delivery of the Concordat action plan aligned to our RC Action Plan. This includes improving awareness of Concordat principles across all career stages and enhancing communication efforts. We will promote excellence in team management through transparency in responsibilities and relevant training. Strengthening representation across early career stages will be achieved through the Research Futures Hub. We aim to foster a supportive community by enhancing networking opportunities and promoting EDI best practices, alongside ensuring accessible HR resources. We will leverage data insights to refine policies (e.g. PURE, Worktribe, ERP) and support and develop an Open Research framework promoting inclusivity and engagement.

Employment

We aim to enhance understanding of our research staff population, particularly mobility and career pathways, through data analysis and review of career origins and destinations. Efforts will be directed at developing clear and transparent promotion processes and career pathways supported by structured training and targeted initiatives, e.g. PROSPER in the context of post-doctoral careers. We will standardise and improve induction practices across Schools, ensuring consistent onboarding for research staff. Celebrating research success will remain a priority, embedding a culture that values diverse achievements through events like Research in Action Week. To promote equitable opportunities, we will ensure consistent application of workload model principles, allowing dedicated time for research and collaboration. Finally, targeted workshops will equip researchers with essential skills for career advancement, directly supporting Heriot-Watt's long-term strategy, Strategy 2025, by fostering growth, excellence, and innovation across our research community, aligning with the goal of "Excelling in Research and Enterprise".

Professional Development of Researchers

In the coming reporting period, HWU will strengthen its support for research staff by enhancing engagement with training and resources focused on professional development and career planning, including the Principal Investigator (PI) Development Programme on grant proposal design. A new mid-senior career development programme will address the specific needs of research leaders, emphasising their role in supporting research staff development.

Through initiatives like the Disability Inclusive Science Careers project, greater skills and awareness in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) will be fostered.

Key actions include establishing a Research Futures Hub for career support, redesigning the 'Research Staff Forum' to a new 'Reference Working Group' that will be part of the Research Futures Hub and integrate PGR and ECR contributions, providing enhanced online resources on career pathways, and delivering an Open Research framework to promote inclusivity and engagement and increase awareness and understanding of Open Research practice.

By addressing these objectives, the Institution aims to create an environment where researchers are supported, valued, and equipped to excel in their careers, further embedding a positive and inclusive research culture.

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 has been compiled by the Research Culture Consultant in consultation with the Global Director of Research Engagement (Co-Chair of the Research Culture Working Group).

The report will be considered at the Research Futures Hub reference group, which will have Research Staff Representatives. It will also be considered for approval at the meeting of the University Committee for Research and Innovation (UCRI) in January 2025, whose membership includes Directors of Research and Enterprise. If approved, it will be considered at the University Executive (UE) and then go to the University Court for approval.

The report will be reviewed by the Research Culture Working Group prior to approval being sought from UCRI and the University Court.

Signature on behalf of governing body: Prof Steve McLaughlin, Deputy Principal for Research and Impact



Contact for queries: **Research Futures Academy:** ResearchFutures@hw.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