

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

Universities and Research Institutes

Name of Institution	Edinburgh Napier University
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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)

Edinburgh Napier University is the #1 Modern University in Scotland (THE World University Rankings 2027). We have over 20,000 students studying with Edinburgh Napier, across our three campuses in Edinburgh, as well as through international and online delivery of our programmes.

At Edinburgh Napier University we are committed to a research culture that is positive, inclusive, and supportive. We uphold integrity, collaboration, and continuous development, ensuring all researchers feel valued and empowered.

Edinburgh Napier University received its first **HR Excellence in Research Award from the European Commission in December 2010** recognising our commitment to embedding the principles of the Concordat to support the Career Development of Researchers and we became a formal signatory to the revised Concordat in December 2019. We successfully retained the HR Excellence award at our last external review in 2023 and have agreed a next submission point of 2027 with Vitae.

Our Concordat governance is overseen by the University Research and Innovation Committee which is chaired by our Dean of Research and Innovation, with strategic leadership provided by our Head of Research Environment and Services within our Research, Innovation and Enterprise (RIE) department. Implementation of our Concordat Action draws on a range of Professional Services and through Academic School leadership groups.

Researcher Development

Aligned with the Concordat, we offer mentoring, training, and leadership development. Early-career researchers receive tailored support, while mid-career and senior researchers are encouraged to engage in leadership and interdisciplinary collaboration. To further support our postgraduate researchers (PGRs), in 2024 we established a Doctoral College, providing dedicated resources, training, and a supportive community to enhance their academic and professional development.

Inclusion

We actively promote equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) through fair recruitment, mentorship, and career development. By embedding EDI principles, we ensure equal access to opportunities and resources for all researchers. The University has developed new Equality Outcomes covering the period 2025-29. This work sits alongside wider activities to reframe how the University supports equality, diversity and inclusion across the University community.

Wellbeing and Work-Life Balance

We prioritise researcher wellbeing through flexible working, mental health support, and workload management, gathering feedback to ensure a sustainable work environment.

Open Research and Integrity

We uphold transparency and integrity by supporting open research, data sharing, and reproducibility. Training in research ethics reinforces accountability and trust.

Collaboration and Impact

Through interdisciplinary and cross-sector partnerships, we foster knowledge exchange and real-world impact, encouraging collaboration over competition. We focus on expanding partnerships with industry and government to increase research impact and career opportunities for our researchers.

Continuous Improvement and Annual Reporting

We regularly evaluate our research culture via institutional assessments and sector benchmarking such as the CEDARS survey and internal staff surveys, ensuring policies evolve to meet emerging challenges. As part of our commitment to the UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, we integrate this framework into our annual reporting through RIE, tracking progress on researcher support, professional development, and inclusion initiatives.

Through these commitments, Edinburgh Napier University cultivates a research environment where all researchers thrive, innovate, and contribute meaningfully to society.

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*)

Our current University Strategy: Shaping Our Future launched in March 2020 has 'Build Careers: Create Opportunities' as one of our strategic objectives, illustrating our commitment to staff development across the university.

The Researcher Development Concordat action plan has connections to other strategic initiatives, such as our Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Funding (KEIF) Strategy, our Public Engagement Strategy, and the work of our Research Integrity Committee, as well as EDI in research activities.

Environment and culture

Our Research and Innovation Strategy continues to drive our research environment and culture in which we operate. In the last three years there has been a strong focus on the establishment of research centres, bringing together researchers, students and academics with shared interests. As a result of our participation in the REF PCE pilot, we have established five workstreams to embed research culture initiatives across the university. The Doctoral College established in April 2024 acts as a focal point for all activity relating to PGR students in the university and is working to integrate research staff as supervisors as part of its remit.

Employment

Employment within our institution is shaped by clear career routes and promotion pathways that support researchers at all stages. Work has been ongoing to provide in-person briefings to researchers as part of the annual promotions cycle helping to raise the visibility of the pathways. Researchers interested in promotions are now also signposted to our mentoring programme.

Our Knowledge Exchange Innovation Fund (KEIF) Strategy is creating more opportunities for researchers to explore a wider range of activities that could support their career; both within and beyond academia.

Professional Development of Researchers

This pillar is delivered through our Researcher Development programme which is available to all staff at the university regardless of career stage. We continue to run a range of workshops on research integrity, supervision, open access, and knowledge exchange amongst other topics. We work to ensure a range of formats are available (online, in-person, hybrid) to make the programme as accessible as possible. We also continue to build external opportunities through partnerships with the BA ECR network, UK Research Integrity Office and reciprocal arrangements with other Scottish Universities.

Within the Researcher Development programme, we have increased provision on Research Leadership, providing a new intensive workshop for new research leaders followed by 1:1 coaching opportunities to embed the learning from the course. Our Academic and Research Mentoring scheme also allows dedicated individualised support for researchers through pairing with an experienced mentor. This allows staff to work with someone outwith their discipline, gaining valuable insights to the wider HE sector.

Our measures of success include:

- Engagement of contract research staff with our current research strategy

- Evidence of progress in CEDARS data and internal YourVoice survey
- Increased engagement with an annual MyContribution review by research staff
- Successful engagement with our Research Career promotion framework by research staff
- Reduced precarity for contract research staff measured through career progression tracking
- Increased numbers of staff holding external research funding
- Increased research student numbers
- Increased completion rate for PhD students
- Increased external recognition of our staff through professional awards, memberships
- Increased number of partnerships and interdisciplinary collaborations
- Evaluation of our Researcher Development programme
- Increased use of Worktribe repository to share open data sets

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]

Please note: some of the initiatives mentioned are cross-cutting against all three pillars of the Concordat but are mentioned in the main pillar for brevity.

Environment and Culture (*max 600 words*)

During the reporting period, Edinburgh Napier University continued to strengthen its research environment through a coordinated programme of activity focused on research culture, integrity, inclusion and community. Building upon the foundations established through the University's Research Culture Manifesto, a significant milestone was the creation of **five Research Culture Workstreams** arising from participation in the REF People, Culture and Environment (PCE) Pilot. These workstreams have provided an institutional mechanism for translating research culture aspirations into sustained action, embedding research culture within institutional planning and creating opportunities for researchers and professional services staff to collaborate on shared priorities.

Institution

The establishment of the **Research Culture Workstreams** represents a significant progression from the University's previous focus on defining research culture ambitions towards implementing structures that can sustain long-term cultural change. The workstreams have strengthened institutional understanding of research culture and provided an avenue through which initiatives to support culture, inclusion, wellbeing, leadership and research practice can be driven.

	<p>The University also strengthened its commitment to responsible and ethical research. Participation in the Scottish Funding Council-funded TreSI project is supporting the development and sharing of resources relating to Trusted Research and international collaboration. This activity was complemented by a programme of ethics workshops delivered for researchers and supervisors, supporting awareness of institutional processes and reinforcing the importance of responsible research conduct.</p> <p>Together, these initiatives have strengthened institutional capacity to support a positive, inclusive and responsible research environment while ensuring that consideration of culture is embedded within strategic planning ahead of our new research strategy being developed during AY26/27.</p> <p>Academic Managers and Research Leaders Recognising the critical role of leadership in shaping culture, the University expanded opportunities for research leaders to develop the skills required to support high-performing and inclusive research environments.</p> <p>The Research Leadership Programme continued to provide a structured development pathway for current and aspiring research leaders. Evaluation data demonstrated significant increases in participants' confidence as leaders, understanding of research culture, ability to support colleagues and sense of belonging within a leadership community. Leadership development was further enhanced through participation in collaborative initiatives such as the <u>Scottish Research Leaders Network</u>, providing opportunities for institutional and sector-wide exchange of good practice. These initiatives have contributed to a stronger culture of leadership that emphasises collaboration, wellbeing, inclusion and support for researcher development.</p> <p>Researchers and Postgraduate Researchers A major focus during the reporting period was creating opportunities for researchers to build connections, share experiences and develop a stronger sense of community.</p> <p>The annual Writing Retreat continued to provide dedicated space for focused writing, reflection and networking. Longitudinal evaluation demonstrates enduring impacts on confidence, productivity, interdisciplinary collaboration and belonging. Researchers consistently report that relationships formed through the retreats continue well beyond the event itself, supporting ongoing collaboration and peer support.</p>
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	<p>The Early Career Researcher Network continued to expand, providing a supportive community for researchers at an important career stage and strengthening links with the British Academy Early Career Researcher Network in Scotland. The Network culminated its annual programme with Edinburgh Napier's first <u>Failure Fest Scotland</u>, developed in partnership with the British Academy ECRN. The event created a safe and supportive environment for researchers to discuss failure, rejection and uncertainty as normal aspects of research careers. Evaluation demonstrated substantial increases in participants' understanding of research culture, confidence as researchers, feelings of support and sense of belonging within the research community, while qualitative feedback highlighted the value of openness, vulnerability and peer connection.</p> <p>The Doctoral College also introduced a longitudinal induction model for postgraduate researchers, recognising that researcher development needs evolve throughout the doctoral journey. By moving beyond a one-off induction approach, the University has strengthened support for PGRs at key stages of their development.</p> <p>Collectively, these activities demonstrate a sustained commitment to creating an inclusive, connected and supportive research culture in which researchers at all career stages can thrive.</p>
Employment (max 600 words)	<p>Edinburgh Napier University recognises that positive employment experiences are fundamental to researcher wellbeing, engagement and career progression. During the reporting period, activity focused on strengthening management practice, supporting career conversations and ensuring researchers have access to consistent and meaningful support throughout their employment.</p> <p>Institution</p> <p>A major institutional development during the period has been the implementation of the University's new People First human resources system (launching in Oct 2026). Alongside the introduction of new processes, this work created an opportunity to review how performance and development discussions support researchers and research-enabling staff.</p> <p>To complement the system rollout, revised guidance was developed on objective setting for researchers. The guidance promotes a broader understanding of academic contribution, recognising not only research outputs and project delivery, but also professional development, leadership, collegiality, community-building and contributions to research culture. This reflects the University's commitment to embedding Concordat principles within everyday employment practices.</p>

	<p>Academic Managers and Research Leaders</p> <p>Recognising that line managers play a central role in researcher experience, the University delivered targeted workshops for managers focused on supporting research staff, conducting effective development conversations and setting meaningful objectives.</p> <p>These activities sought to improve consistency in management approaches while increasing understanding of the distinctive nature of research careers. Managers were encouraged to consider career aspirations, skills development needs and wellbeing alongside project delivery objectives, reflecting Concordat expectations around researcher support and development.</p> <p>Leadership development activities further strengthened management capability. Through the Research Leadership Programme, participants explored leadership styles, team development, communication, wellbeing and inclusive approaches to management. Evaluation data demonstrated notable increases in confidence and capability across multiple leadership domains, including supporting colleagues and fostering positive research environments.</p> <p>Mentoring and coaching opportunities also continued. Access to MentorNet and thesis mentoring provided additional sources of support, helping researchers access guidance, networks and career advice beyond their immediate supervisory relationships.</p> <p>Researchers and Postgraduate Researchers</p> <p>For researchers, these developments have contributed to a more supportive employment environment characterised by clearer expectations, improved management support and greater access to development opportunities.</p> <p>Researchers have benefited from strengthened performance and development conversations, increased opportunities to influence institutional priorities and enhanced access to mentoring and peer-support networks. These initiatives help researchers navigate the increasingly complex demands of academic careers while supporting wellbeing and career progression.</p> <p>For postgraduate researchers, improvements to induction, mentoring and supervisory support provide a stronger foundation for successful progression through doctoral study and into subsequent career stages.</p>
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	<p>Taken together, these developments demonstrate progress towards creating an employment environment in which researchers are supported not only to deliver research outcomes but also to develop, contribute and progress throughout their careers.</p>
<p>Professional development (max 600 words)</p>	<p>Professional and career development remained a major institutional priority throughout the reporting period. Activity focused on providing accessible, evidence-informed and inclusive development opportunities that support researchers from doctoral study through to research leadership.</p> <p>Institution</p> <p>The University continued to develop a comprehensive researcher development ecosystem aligned with Concordat expectations and the principles of lifelong professional learning.</p> <p>A notable achievement was Edinburgh Napier's role as a founding partner of the <u>National 10 Development Days Festival</u> due to run between Sept-Oct 2026. Participation in this sector-wide initiative will help raise awareness of the Concordat commitment to protected time for development while providing researchers with access to a diverse programme of high-quality activities delivered collaboratively across the UK sector.</p> <p>The University also expanded provision relating to emerging issues affecting research practice. Workshops exploring AI and the researcher, delivered in partnership with colleagues from our Department for Learning, Teaching and Enhancement (DLTE), supported researchers to engage critically with opportunities and challenges associated with artificial intelligence and rapidly evolving digital technologies.</p> <p>Academic Managers and Research Leaders</p> <p>Professional development opportunities for research leaders continued to expand through the Research Leadership Programme and Scottish Research Leaders Network.</p> <p>These initiatives provided structured opportunities for leaders to develop strategic thinking, people management, communication and culture-building skills. Participants reported increased confidence in leadership roles, stronger professional networks and greater understanding of how leadership influences research culture and researcher development.</p> <p>By investing in leadership development, the University is helping ensure that researchers are supported by managers who understand both the technical and human dimensions of research careers.</p>

	<p>Researchers and Postgraduate Researchers Researchers benefited from a diverse portfolio of development opportunities tailored to different career stages and aspirations.</p> <p>The Early Career Researcher Network continued to provide researcher-led development, networking and peer-support opportunities. Writing Retreats provided dedicated time and space for scholarly writing alongside opportunities for reflection, collaboration and community-building.</p> <p>Mentoring and coaching programmes further strengthened career support. Matching through MentorNet, group career coaching and thesis mentoring enabled researchers to access advice, broaden professional networks and explore future career pathways. These initiatives recognise that successful researcher development extends beyond formal training and includes access to relationships, communities and role models.</p> <p>The Doctoral College's longitudinal induction model has strengthened support for postgraduate researchers by embedding development opportunities throughout the doctoral journey rather than concentrating support at entry points alone.</p> <p>Failure Fest Scotland also made an important contribution to researcher development by focusing on resilience, wellbeing and career sustainability. Evaluation demonstrated substantial improvements in participants' confidence, understanding of research culture, career optimism and sense of support, highlighting the importance of development opportunities that address both professional skills and the realities of contemporary research careers.</p> <p>Across all career stages, activity during the reporting period demonstrates a continued move towards an integrated researcher development ecosystem where leadership, skills development, community-building, mentoring and wellbeing are mutually reinforcing. By combining institutional investment, skilled managerial support and researcher-led initiatives, Edinburgh Napier continues to strengthen opportunities for researchers to develop fulfilling, sustainable and successful careers.</p>
	<p>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>
	<p>The reporting period has demonstrated the value of embedding researcher development and research culture within institutional priorities while also highlighting the challenges of</p>

<p>sustaining momentum in a constrained resource environment. A key lesson has been the importance of collaboration, both internally and across the sector, to maximise impact and ensure continued delivery of high-quality support for researchers.</p> <p>Like many institutions, Edinburgh Napier University has experienced staffing pressures and increasing demands on both academic and professional services colleagues. These challenges have reinforced the need to prioritise activity carefully and to seek opportunities for collaboration rather than duplication of effort. Our involvement in a range of sector-wide initiatives, including the National 10 Development Days Festival, the Scottish Research Leaders Network and the TreSI project, has demonstrated the benefits of partnership working. By sharing expertise, resources and delivery responsibilities, we have been able to maintain a broad and impactful development offer whilst making efficient use of limited staff capacity. This experience is shaping our future approach, with greater emphasis on collaborative and shared provision where appropriate.</p> <p>A second lesson relates to the challenge of balancing delivery with evaluation. While feedback and impact data gathered from initiatives such as the Research Leadership Programme, Writing Retreats and Failure Fest have been extremely valuable in demonstrating outcomes, collecting and analysing robust evaluation evidence requires significant time and resource. As researcher development activity has expanded, maintaining consistent approaches to evaluation across all programmes has become increasingly challenging. We recognise the importance of evidence-informed planning and decision making and will continue to strengthen our evaluation processes, whilst ensuring that data collection remains proportionate and sustainable.</p> <p>During this reporting period, the wider policy and reporting landscape has also continued to evolve. In response to staffing pressures and changes associated with HR Excellence in Research reporting requirements, the University has revised its planned timetable for the next submission to Vitae, extending the current cycle until 2027. This adjustment reflects a pragmatic approach to ensuring that future planning is both evidence-based and fully aligned with institutional priorities.</p> <p>The extension to 2027 will create an opportunity to undertake a comprehensive review of our current action plan, priorities and measures of success. This review will coincide with the development and implementation of the University's new Strategy and the enabling Research and Innovation Strategy, both of which are being developed during this reporting period and will conclude during academic year 2026/27. Aligning Concordat planning with these institutional strategies will ensure that researcher development, research culture and research leadership remain integral to the University's future ambitions.</p>
<p>Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period <i>(max 500 words)</i></p>

During the next reporting period, Edinburgh Napier University will focus on embedding researcher development and research culture within the University's new strategy, while continuing to deliver high-quality development opportunities through a sustainable and collaborative model.

Embed researcher development within institutional strategy

As the University finalises its new Strategy and enabling Research and Innovation Strategy during AY2026/27, a key objective will be to ensure that researcher development, research culture and research leadership are reflected in strategic priorities and implementation plans. We will also conclude and evaluate the five Research Culture Workstreams established through the REF People, Culture and Environment (PCE) Pilot, identifying successful interventions for longer-term adoption and informing the next phase of our Concordat action plan.

Deliver an impactful researcher development programme through collaboration

We will continue to provide a diverse programme of development opportunities for researchers at all career stages, with a growing emphasis on shared provision and partnership working across the sector. Building on initiatives such as the National 10 Development Days Festival and the Scottish Research Leaders Network, we will seek to expand access to development opportunities while making effective use of institutional resources. Success will be measured through participation levels, positive participant feedback and evidence of sustained engagement.

Strengthen leadership, mentoring and research communities

We will continue to invest in research leadership development, mentoring and peer-support networks, recognising their importance in fostering positive research cultures and supporting career progression. Established initiatives, including the Research Leadership Programme, ECR Network, Writing Retreats and Failure Fest, will continue to provide opportunities for researchers to build confidence, resilience and professional networks. Measures of success will include participation, self-reported gains in confidence and leadership capability, and evidence of ongoing community engagement.

Enhance support for postgraduate researchers

Through the Doctoral College, we will continue to develop our longitudinal approach to doctoral researcher support, ensuring that development opportunities are available throughout the postgraduate journey. Priorities include strengthening induction, skills development, researcher community-building and career planning. Success will be monitored through engagement levels, student feedback and indicators of postgraduate researcher satisfaction and experience.

Collectively, these objectives will support the University's commitment to creating a supportive, inclusive and development-focused research environment, while ensuring that Concordat principles remain closely aligned with institutional priorities and future ambitions.

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 was created by the Head of Research Environment and Services and first reviewed by the Dean of Research and Innovation and Deputy Vice Chancellor for feedback and approval. The report is tabled at the November Research Innovation Committee (RIC) for further discussion and approval as a sub-committee of Academic Board.

Signature on behalf of governing body: Dr. Gráinne Barkess

Contact for queries: g.barkess@napier.ac.uk

This annual report will be analysed by the 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 via the email address listed on the RDC website: www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk.