

HR Excellence in Research Award: Ten year report – February 2021

Edinburgh Napier University received the HR Excellence in Research Award from the European Commission in December 2010 and retained it in 2018 after an external review process. After the publication of the revised [Concordat to support the Career Development of Researchers](#) we became a formal signatory to the Concordat in December 2019 reaffirming our commitments to Researcher Development.

1. How the review was undertaken

The internal review was led by the Head of Researcher Development within the Research Innovation and Enterprise team working closely with staff within the Schools and other Professional services. Discussions from our Concordat Steering group along with research staff representatives on our committees were used to capture views from the research community as part of the review process. Feedback submitted from researchers to RIE about recent development events and initiatives have also been considered alongside data from our 2019 PRES, CROS and PIRLS surveys. The Researcher Development Concordat has also been discussed regularly at the Research and Innovation Committee which formally monitors research activity and quality within the university.

Our primary audience for our Concordat Action plan has always been our contract research staff and research technicians, however many of the actions have potential benefits for our wider research community of PGR students and research-active academic staff. Our researcher development activities have always take an inclusive approach running many events for anyone who identifies as a researcher, and our [new University strategy](#) launched in March 2020 has '*Build Careers: Create Opportunities*' as one of our strategic objectives.

2. Impact of Coronavirus pandemic

2020 was unprecedented in the disruption caused to university activities, and general day-to-day life due to the emerging Coronavirus pandemic. Edinburgh Napier, like most organisations, moved to a model of working from home for the overwhelming majority of its staff from mid-March 2020 onwards.

Some of the planned activities from our 2019-2020 Concordat plan had to be put on hold or changed, so the Research, Innovation and Enterprise (RIE) team could focus on dealing with the effects of the pandemic on our research community. Several members of the RIE team were also on furlough or absent during periods of 2020, and reprioritisation of our activities had to occur as a result.

Our immediate concerns were to identify the impacts on research projects and research staff employed on those projects; seeking extensions from funders, applying for furlough for research staff where appropriate, and responding to urgent calls for research projects to understand the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on society. We also focused efforts on the best use of '*Covid-19 response funding*' from the Scottish Funding Council to support researchers and their research projects across AY20/21.

While some of our planned Concordat actions were paused, our aim to support our researchers as much as possible throughout the pandemic disruption aligns with the ethos of the Concordat, to create a culture where our researchers are supported and can thrive. We are confident that the actions we undertook have enabled the university to respond to the disruption in a way that protects our research base, and our researchers are contributing to societal and economic recovery through their research activities.

3. Key achievements and progress

Specific progress against each Concordat Principle over the two years of the award is described here and in the updated 2019-2020 action plan.

Principles 1 and 2: We launched our Research Career promotions framework in Feb 2019 which for the first time created a clear route for contract research staff to apply for promotion. While engagement has been in small numbers so far, we continue to promote the new framework to our research staff. Consultation on the first two promotion rounds identified challenges for staff to engage with activities that would provide evidence towards promotion, and this will be addressed in our future Concordat action plan. We continue to use regular staff engagement surveys to provide feedback mechanisms on working conditions and these are now running monthly to ensure a rapid response during the pandemic. We revamped our Research Awards as part of the wider Above and Beyond Awards in order to have research reach the same visibility as the Learning and Teaching awards.

Principle 3: Our Public Engagement strategy was launched in May 2019 and we continue to have strong engagement with PE activity across the six Schools supported by dedicated seed funding for new PE projects each year. We continue to highlight opportunities to become involved in teaching activities to our research community and have showcased examples of PhD students and ECRs gaining Fellowship of AdvanceHE to enhance their CV and employability prospects.

Principle 4: We continue to support research staff to apply for research funding, and have run several grant writing workshops during 2019-2020 which has been complemented by individualised support on 1:1 basis from our External Funding Team. We have increased the number of external funders running workshops/briefings to help researchers identify suitable funding opportunities. The University ran a significant programme of Leadership development during 2019/20 – through six days of leadership training available to all staff at Grade 6 and above, with several PI's taking up the training. During lockdown RIE converted its Researcher Development programme to run online, and we ran almost 30 events between March-July with over 340 attendees, with average feedback from the sessions being 4.8/5 for both usefulness and enjoyment. From the start of AY2020/21 we continue to run our programme online and are seeing continued high levels of engagement. Through our Researcher Development funding we were able to pilot a successful mentoring programme for contract research staff; which converted to an online format as we moved into lockdown and had 7 mentoring pairs work together for 4 months. This pilot has formed the basis for a cross-university mentoring scheme between Edinburgh Napier and Queen Margaret University to support contract research staff adapt to the challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic. This will run from Feb to July 2021 and it is hoped will be the start of longer term mentoring between both universities.

Principle 5: To help researchers understand the research landscape and their role in it, we increased the number of briefings on sector initiatives such as REF, the Research Integrity Concordat, and Vitae's RDF. Researchers understanding and awareness of these sector policies increased as measured through improved scores in our CROS 2019 data compared to 2017. In nearly all categories our researchers had higher levels of awareness of these initiatives (Concordats, Vitae, REF, and Athena Swan etc.) than the sector averages. This improved knowledge should help our researchers take responsibility for their own development within this landscape.

Principle 6: The University reported on its Equal Pay audit and its equality outcomes, as well as embedding Equality, Diversity and inclusion approaches within its REF Code of Practice. Our staff networks continue to thrive with two additional networks being launched; our Armed Forces Network and our BAMEish Network.

Principle 7: We ran PRES, CROS and PIRLS in 2019 and the results were discussed at various forums including our Research Innovation and our Research Degrees Committee. We had planned to run both PRES and CEDARS in 2020 but their launch coincided with the beginnings of lockdown and so did not go ahead.

4. Strategies for 2021-2022

When the revised Concordat was published in September 2019 we reviewed its principles and the Senior Leadership Team approved becoming a formal signatory to the Concordat in December 2019. We have formed a new Concordat Steering Group to drive forward our commitments to the revised Concordat and our new action plan 2021-2022 aligns to that version. Our Concordat Action plan also connects to our new research strategy and its transformational action to *'Build Research capacity and capability'*.

From our gap analysis we have identified several different career stages that we need to focus on – including actions that support **becoming a researcher at Edinburgh Napier, developing as a researcher, developing research leadership, and support for career transitions**. For each of these, we have identified focus areas that will help us implement the Concordat Principles as illustrated in Figure 1.

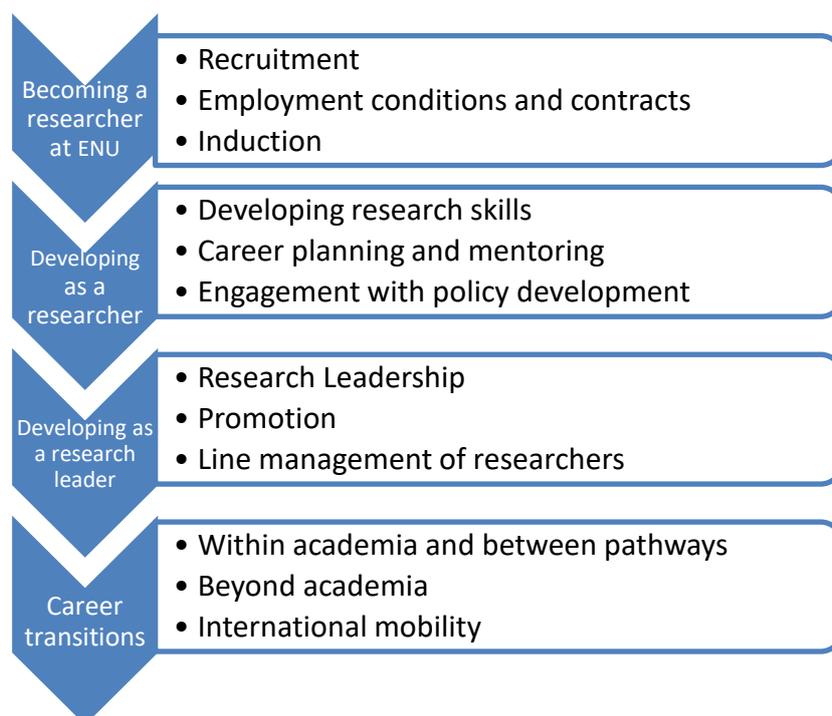


Figure 1. Key career stages for the Concordat Action Plan (Becoming, Developing, Leadership, and transitions) with action areas for each.

5. Success measures

Our success will be measured against specific actions as outlined in our Action Plan 2021-2022. Some general indicators of success for the next two year cycle will include:

- Engagement of contract research staff with our new research strategy launched in March 2020
- Evidence of progress in PRES and CEDARS data
- Continued engagement with an annual MyContribution review by research staff
- Successful engagement with our Research Career promotion framework by research staff
- 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