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**12 YEAR HREiR / CONCORDAT REPORT – University of Stirling**

**Institutional Context**

The University of Stirling (UoS) received the HR Excellence in Research Award in 2011 and has retained it every two years following external review. UoS became a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers in October 2020. UoS responsibility for Concordat implementation via a cross-university action plan is led by the Research Environment Group (REG). REG led this activity with a clear strategy in place to focus the benefits of our activity on our ECR community. REG reports to the University Research Committee quarterly.

**Institutional structure**

The University of Stirling has five academic Faculties: Arts & Humanities, Health Sciences & Sport, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and the Stirling Management School, with 586 research active staff (see Tables 1 & 2).

**Table 1: Researchers by Academic Unit (headcount data, 1.8.23)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Faculty/Service** | **Research Active staff** |
| Deputy Principal's Office | 4 |
| Faculty of Arts and Humanities | 131 |
| Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport | 95 |
| Faculty of Natural Sciences | 183 |
| Faculty of Social Sciences | 109 |
| Research, Innovation & Bus. Engagement | 1 |
| Stirling Management School | 63 |
| **Total** | **586** |

**Table 2: Research active staff by job title (headcount data, 1.8.23)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Job Title Group** | **Headcount** |
| Associate Professor | 25 |
| Lecturer | 176 |
| Post-Doctoral Research Assistant/Research Assistant | 38 |
| Post-Doctoral Research Fellow | \*included in research fellow |
| Professor | 120 |
| Reader | \*included in associate prof |
| Research fellow | 107 |
| Senior Research Fellow | 5 |
| Senior Lecturer | 115 |
| **Total** | **586** |

**REG membership & Governance**

REG membership is reviewed annually to ensure cross-faculty and cross-career stage representation and to ensure that succession planning has been considered. The current membership has representation from all five academic faculties, HR&OD, RIBE, and the Careers Service. There is representation across career stages and roles, including postdoctoral research fellows, lecturers, senior lecturers, and professors. The Deputy Principal (Research) is a member of REG and has overall institutional responsibility for research and is also Chair of the University Research Committee, to which REG reports. Membership also includes the institutional Dean for Research Engagement & Performance and the institutional Dean of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion.

The group meets formally six times per academic year reporting to the University’s Research Committee. Working groups take forward areas of focus and support delivery of the action plan and have recruited members from the wider university community. The membership structure ensures that the principles of the Concordat can be embedded across UoS, and can foster strong links with faculty groups, ECR groups, and professional services.

Active working groups in 2022-23 supported progress to aspects of the 2021-23 action plan including promoting and evaluating CEDARS, Research Culture, development of a Researcher Guide, DORA, Professorial/REG Colloquia, Recruitment & Promotion. Three of these (DORA, Research Culture, Researcher Guide) recruited members from the wider university community, providing a route into full REG membership.

Concordat implementation and wider activity are communicated and disseminated via REG members reporting directly to formal University/Faculty committees. There is shared knowledge and understanding into complementary Institution-wide actions such as: Athena Swan, Race Equality, Gender Equality and Wellbeing through common membership of working groups. REG membership includes colleagues who are part of the University’s Gender Equality Steering Group, as well as various faculty/departmental Athena Swan groups. The forward Athena Swan action plan includes activity specifically in relation to research staff and REG is actively exploring how to effectively share survey data and feedback across the institution to support the drafting of equalities-related documentation and action plans.

**Internal Evaluation**

The internal governance and structures outlined above allow for the on-going evaluation and analysis of our action plan and activity. The governance in place has also enabled clear and consistent alignment with our new University Strategy and the underpinning enabling strategies for Research & Innovation and our People Strategy.

We have been able to identify areas of positive improvement in relation to our 2021-23 plan, and areas/topics for focus in our forward action plan via participation in CEDARS, HR-led Pulse surveys (induction and agile working topics), and a range of informal feedback channels including: Research Culture Conversation sessions, Professorial/REG colloquia, REG working groups, Faculty ECR groups, and responses to blog posts on REG activity.

The result of this evaluation has led us to create an action plan which will allow us to deliver on the principles and obligations of the Researchers Concordat to benefit of our wider research community.

**Past Progress and achievements to date**

We offer a wide ranging and diverse programme of development opportunities via our Researcher Development programme which provide a mix of online (live), in-person and on-demand provision. In 2022-23 there were over 90 sessions available to research active staff, and 117 individuals engaged with the provision, representing a full range of career stages and all five faculties. The programme contains a variety of events supporting academic and alternative careers, with entrepreneurial skills as a key component, utilising our extensive partners in industry, policy and third sector and local communities.
Wellbeing is another area of strength and focus at UoS with a comprehensive programme of support and resources available for all staff, including menopause, men’s health, mental health first aid and mental health and wellbeing.

***Principle 1: Environment & Culture:***

Creation and effectiveness of new **Induction guide** in raising awareness of Concordat, REG activity and ensuring that all new research staff can access resources and support. In relation to this, REG/RIBE have worked with HR to strengthen the researcher focus at corporate induction/welcome events. This content has been highly rated in feedback, and that we have seen an increase in interaction with UoS’ wider research eco-system following these activities.

Creation of new **Researcher guide** – the Researcher Guide is a new information resource for Research Staff and Principal Investigators developed to support researchers to navigate policies, roles and expectations in their careers and involvement in research projects. The Researcher Guide provides guidance for managing the practical elements of being a researcher at Stirling and is intended for all research active staff.

**REG membership** – active succession planning and refresh of membership to ensure REG remains representative of wider research population. Inclusion of colleagues out with REG in the working groups, via application process. REG has established itself as an inclusive and engaged forum which actively works to improve the research environment of the UoS.

**REG working groups** – this model for delivery of actions has proven to be highly effective and allows for engagement with the wider research community beyond REG on these focussed topics.

**Research Culture Champions** – the UoS now has an established network of 12 research culture champions and runs a regular research culture conversation event which is led by our Dean for Research Performance & Engagement (also a member of REG and is the institutional Concordat Champion). The Champions’ network was established in late 2022 to share the good practice highlighted in our annual Research Culture Awards. The model of conversation sessions will continue to be used as an effective means of gathering informal feedback. The UoS’ Research Culture Awards were included in the Universities UK Concordat platform of practice in 2023, and in their annual report as an example of good practice. A poster on the Research Culture Awards was presented at the University of Warwick’s International Research Culture Conference (September 2023).

Our CEDARS 2023 scores of relevance to this principle show that we have seen an improvement in how colleagues consider that the institution promotes the highest standards of research integrity (75% in 2023, and we are also higher than the sector average (69%). Our CEDARS 2023 scores for Research Integrity and Research Culture were generally high, with 86% of respondents being active or interested in research culture (12% higher than the national average).

***Principle 2: Employment:***

Introduction of a **Research Leadership Programme (RDP)** in 2021/22 which has been continued and expanded. The programme receives very positive feedback and is tailored to research active staff who lead/will lead research projects. Provision has been expanded to offer the programme each semester in response to demand and positive feedback.

**Research Culture awards** – a mechanism to celebrate excellent people management. We have seen an increase in nominations across all categories year on year. In 2023 (year 4) a total of 243 nominations were received, for 173 individuals across a range of categories, from 165 nomination forms, a significant rise since year 1 (63 forms submitted, and 125 nominations received for 89 individuals across various categories). A REG Working Group supported the Research Culture awards, and this led the creation of the Culture Champions’ network (see above).

Our CEDARS 2023 scores of relevance to this principle show that we have seen an improvement in scores around fairness of workload (50%, an increase of 14%), and 58% consider that UoS actively promotes importance of good mental health (increase of 9%). An increase in scores around awareness, uptake and reported usefulness of induction events at local and intuitional level (significant increase for all, and our recruitment procedures are also perceived positively in terms of fairness, inclusivity, transparency and being merit-based. 54% of respondents considered that they were appropriately recognised for their contributions to the institution (increase of 6%), and this is across the research system.

Additional analysis of our CEDARS 2023 data has allowed us to assess how responses from colleagues on fixed-term/funding-limited contracts and open-ended contracts differ, and this has informed our forward action planning.

***Principle 3: Professional & Career Development:***

Delivery of **Professorial/REG colloquia** programme which involves staff from all levels to ask a panel of experienced staff and mixed-level staff questions in an informal setting to help consider issues such as development of interdisciplinary research, being a professor, etc. Attendance and feedback have been positive, and the colloquia have become a regular feature in our events calendar.

Increase in provision of RDP sessions and engagement events delivered by RIBE’s Business Engagement Team regarding **Knowledge Exchange and Business Engagement** and workshops for faculties to provide an overview of support available for KTPs, consultancy, business engagement etc. This is part of a partnership approach being taken across UoS regarding Business Engagement.

Provision of **Supervisory Development and Training** has been enhanced and updated. In place is a mandatory programme of sessions, which is tailored to stage and level of experience in supervision of PGR students. Engagement with this programme is monitored and reported on externally. The programme provides interactive workshops, masterclasses, and online modules complemented by fixed resources and support clinics and is designed to meet the professional development needs of all those involved in doctoral supervisory practice.

CEDARS 2023 data shows us that managers/supervisors are encouraging researchers to engage in personal and career development activities, at a higher rate (74%) than the national average (68%). There has also been an increase in awareness of institutional support in this area (66%), and again, higher than the national average (54%).

**Strategic objectives**

The 2023-26 plan will encourage ambition and evidence building around changes and impact. It will be aspirational, evidence progression and importantly contain new and specific actions that address needs of contract researchers first and foremost. It was agreed in REG Aug 2023 that the plan will continue to encompass actions to the benefit of the wider researcher community. The 2023-26 action plan has been drafted to align with key institutional strategies (Institutional Strategic Plan, R&I Strategy, People & Culture Strategy) and wider sector initiatives (Athena Swan, Concordat to Support Research Integrity etc.). UoS has a strong focus on culture in its new forward looking strategic documents, and the work of REG in the implementation of the Concordat is directly aligned with this:

***“...This strategic plan puts our students and staff front and centre – they are the people who will deliver our ambitions. By providing the best environment for them to innovate; to carry out pure and applied research; and to learn effectively, we are equipping the next generation with the tools to lead our city, our region, our nation and the wider world...”***

***“We will undertake all our research and innovation activity to the highest standards of excellence and research integrity...”***

From our CEDARS data, Research Culture Conversation sessions and other feedback channels it was possible to identify several priority actions/areas for focus which have been incorporated into the action plan. These include:

* Consideration of research leave scheme
* Exploration of protected research time for all open-ended staff, not just those on T&R contracts
* implementation of the narrative CV for identified internal schemes
* Development and use of Achieving Success for ECRs/Contract Researchers, to ensure that the process is effective for these cohorts
* Creation of new internal mentoring scheme

It has been possible to look at the split between colleagues on fixed-term versus open-ended contracts in the CEDARS 2023 data. Some areas of difference which will be explored in future activities of REG include:

* Perception of workload and workload allocation fairness
* Opportunities to participate in decision-making processes
* Perception around clarity of promotions and advancement pathways
* Having a career development plan in place
* Access to a mentor

To allow for continuity between plans, some actions from 2021-23 will be carried forward to our new 2023-26 action plan, with appropriate revision of target dates and deadlines, and have been updated to reflect any progress made, or institutional changes which have occurred, and to facilitate the embedding of initiatives developed in the 2021-23 plan.

Actions being continued and further developed include:

* Raising awareness of DORA and creating a guide to responsible research assessment
* Effective dissemination and monitoring impact in relation to our Induction Guide, Researcher Guide, and 10 days discussion paper.
* Use of CEDARS analysis to improve our understanding for all of our research cohort, and to inform and support future plans and strategic activity
* Research integrity activity, in line with the new Institutional Strategy 2023-30.

**Implementation Plan**

To allow us to measure the impact of our action plan, we will use the following means:

* A new series of pulse surveys that address questions on research culture and environment that support several connected initiatives; including the Concordat, Athena Swan and progress towards our strategic aims
* Enhanced analysis of CEDARS data (gender and contract breakdown on key questions)
* Informal qualitative feedback gathered through ‘Conversation’ sessions, building on the success of our Research Culture conversations, REG colloquia, and Festival of Research.
* Continued implementation of the working groups model to deliver on our action plan, and inclusion of colleagues from beyond REG.

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**07.02.23**