

HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH: UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF SCOTLAND SIX YEAR REVIEW REPORT

The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) has held the HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) since 2016. All previous actions plans and reports are available on our website. (<https://www.uws.ac.uk/research/research-environment/researcher-development-concordat/>)

Strategy and Vision

University of the West of Scotland is driving an ambitious strategy for high-quality learning and teaching, and research and innovation, with a global engagement agenda to reflect the needs of the 21st century workplace. Our [Strategy 2025](#) was developed in consultation with colleagues across the University who shared their perspective on UWS's strengths, the challenges we may face in the future and what we want to achieve by 2025. It sets out our UWS truths including: "We value our people and UWS is a great place to work."

Delivering a vision to support this truth in relation to the researcher development Concordat is a collective responsibility for the institution and line managers of researchers. This vision is overseen by the Concordat Steering group who have set out an ambitious three-year implementation plan to take UWS towards a fully integrated research community. Within this community our excellent researchers are provided with equally excellent opportunities to contribute, develop and progress, feel valued and supported to achieve their full potential.

Introduction

To support the HR Excellence process and alignment of our work with the Researcher Development Concordat UWS established a Concordat Steering Group over six years ago. Due to the Covid-19 interruptions, UWS amended the 2020-2022 Action Plan and have adjusted how the university consulted researchers to inform our 2022-2025 Action Plan.

A full review of progress has been undertaken and UWS have updated the Action Plan, informed by the views of research staff, gathered in informal feedback sessions, through our online forums on MS Teams and via focus groups. The updated backward action plan and forward action plan for 2022-2025 are published on the [Researcher Development](#) section of the UWS website.

Context

UWS research staff numbers rarely exceed $n > 30$. Therefore, at UWS our actions are designed to include anyone who does research, with a focus on early career researchers (ECR), considered as anyone at the career stage of Postdoc through to the first 5 years of their first academic posts (i.e. lecturer). However, during previous reviews we have found that not everyone fits this narrow definition of early career researcher. For example, staff who have experience working in practice before joining the UWS academic community. Our approach to researcher engagement is open and we actively encourage participation across events for both research and academic staff, as well as postgraduate research students. This activity is designed to help foster a vibrant research community at UWS and build bridges between staff and student communities. We consider our research staff cohort to be ~600 academic staff (with staff on fixed term contacts $n < 30$).

The support to engage the researcher community has benefited from investment and university reorganisation. Through bespoke researcher development activities, and with assistance from the wider Research Services team, UWS are seeing a post pandemic return of research focused activities to be further developed as outlined in the new three-year plan.

Process of Self Audit

The self-audit process has been led by the Concordat Steering Group. The views of research staff were gathered through informal feedback, the MS Teams Staff Forum for Research, and the UWS Colleagues' survey. Targeted focus groups looking at progress towards the principals of the Concordat were held. We have incorporated relevant CEDARS questions in our 2022 institution wide Colleagues' Survey which we will take into consideration when we conduct an interim action plan review in 2023/24, around 18 months into the forward three-year action plan cycle.

There has been significant progress since UWS reported on our four-year review detailed below and further in the backward Action Plan 2020-2022 (updated Dec 2022). Concordat Steering Group meetings, Culture Café events and meetings organised by the Staff Forum for Research also provided an opportunity to consult with researchers on the delivery of the 2020-2022 action plan. Continuous feedback and consultation are built into the plan through continuous action tracking and reporting to the Concordat Steering Group. A review of the approach to staff surveys and how we respond to feedback is built into the new forward Action Plan 2022-25.

Governance

The Concordat Steering Group and Research Staff Forum are formal sub-committees of the UWS Research & Enterprise Committee (REAC). The Staff Forum for Research has over 400 members and communicates University-wide via MS Teams. The Staff Forum for Research is supported by Research Services but run by researchers.

Progress since 4 year review

Environment and Culture

At UWS collaborative, inclusive and open research is valued and supported. Our global research reputation is built on the successful delivery of applied impactful research aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. All the actions plans for HREiR strive to provide a working environment for staff and doctoral students that supports a positive research culture.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research, Innovation & Engagement adopted the Café Culture discussion format designed by Wellcome Trust to listen to colleagues and talk about the challenges in research culture and reflect on what a better culture looks like. These discussions helped shape the response to supporting researchers when the Covid pandemic lockdowns forced most of our community to work from home and more planned for 2023.

Researcher Development Programme

To help UWS researchers succeed, a range of programmes, courses, seminars, resources and events are planned each year via our internal planning processes and detail as actions in the three-year plan. All programmes are mapped against [Vitae's Researcher Development Framework](#), and where applicable, [The Royal Societies' Resume for Researchers](#)

UWS People & Organisation Development, with support from Research Services and the Library offer an extensive range of training and development options for staff. The design of the overall researcher development programme takes account of the fact that research careers and career pathways are varied. Progress towards the Concord is demonstrated below, highlights from the programme delivered over the 2020-2022 period.

Annual Research Festival

Our annual research festival returned in hybrid format in 2022. Research Festival week at UWS is an opportunity for staff and students to articulate and showcase their research. It also provides a platform for participants to connect with others, and to foster new or nurture

existing collaborative partnerships. The packed programme of online and on-campus activities celebrating research was delivered in collaboration with researchers and research staff. Much like a fringe festival, researchers could also organise their own research development events and take responsibility for their own and peer development.

PGR Supervisor Development Module and Forum

The PGR Supervisor Development module is well attended and receives good feedback. Staff value the chance to meet other colleagues and learn from different experiences. Following completion they are eligible to bid for studentships as part of a team that must include an early career researcher. The Supervisor Forum hosted on MS Teams has 220 members and is an active community.

Academic Writing

Academic Writing continues to be a key focus for support and with events and the Power hour of Writing running throughout the academic year. The Academic Writing group on Teams gains new members regularly and the overall number of attendances at the Power Hours is growing as well. The community is 193 strong in December 2022.

Grant Writing & Funding

The UWS Grant Accelerator was delivered to over 40 UWS researchers across two pathways during the 2020-2022 period. The Yellow Pathway focused on first and smaller grant applications by demystifying the application process. The Purple Pathway supported more experienced researchers with more ambitious grant applications. Programme follow up included hosting virtual tea breaks and writing sessions to support collaborative working and a positive culture.

Vice Chancellor Studentships

UWS has established an annual call for fully funded studentships, reserved for early career researchers to act as lead supervisors. UWS awarded 28 Vice Chancellor Studentships to early career researchers acting as supervisory leads during the period of the backward action plan.

Fortnightly Researcher Development update

In addition to a weekly PGR Development update, researchers are provided with a fortnightly summary of events and resources for research staff. These updates are shared via the Staff Forum for Research on MS Teams.

Other achievements

- From the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and up to December 2021 bridging funding was available and arrangements were made to ensure that 15 staff on fixed term contracts were not adversely affected by the pandemic.
- Through the Staff Forum for Research staff can access peer support and are encouraged to explore a range of experiences to enhance their skill sets, volunteer for a committee, or offer to mentor colleagues.
- UWS' approach to supporting Early Career Researchers includes: (1) ensuring ECR representation on main research committees; (2) establishing and funding the Staff Forum for Research, established in 2018, (3) Programme offering professional development opportunities and (4) normally requiring ECR involvement as standard for all UWS-supported research projects.

Other initiatives demonstrating progress

- Returners' scheme: this scheme allows access to funding for staff who are off work due to pregnancy, maternity or long-term illness to support them in their research career.
- Carer's Fund: allows staff to access funds to enable them to cover the childcare or caring costs of attending staff development conferences. This is to ensure those with caring responsibilities are supported and have similar opportunities to their peers who do not have caring responsibilities.
- Flexible working and Dependants Leave: UWS offers a range of flexible working patterns to suit individual circumstances and business need. In addition, we offer Dependants Leave for any staff members who require to take time off to look after their dependants.

Next Steps and Future Strategy

UWS welcomed the revised Concordat launched in 2019. The university had already recognised that many of our excellent researchers were not staying in academia and we had a responsibility to introduce opportunities across our researcher development programme. The opportunities focused on collaborative academic/industry partnerships, IP, knowledge exchange and secondments, to ensure that we are supporting the development of multi-skilled researchers ready for careers in academia or industry. To deliver our key responsibilities we intend to focus on continued investment in researcher development, sustained listening to our researchers to maintain and develop a vibrant research culture, and to introduce new training and resources for line managers of researchers.

UWS are taking immediate action in response to feedback in the most recent Colleague survey and the strategic direction is agreed. It will focus on the development of five inter-related people priorities:

- Strengthening employee voice
- Promoting wellbeing including work life balance
- Supporting a culture of change
- Developing our people
- Ensuring sustainable reward and recognition

Progress against these priorities will also be reviewed against the forward action plan as we deliver the next steps.

Concordat Principle - Environment and Culture

- A commitment to additional staff resource to support researcher development.
- Managers Toolkit with research specific section, including guidance on the relevant issues.
- Programme of training for line managers of Researchers highlighting requirements within Concordat.

Concordat Principle - Employment

- Full Employee Lifecycle Review with focus on improving recruitment and selection processes and procedures.
- Focus on resources for Managers including a checklist for line managers of research staff to help them engage with their team openly and fully in relation to researcher career development.

Principle - Professional and Career Development

- Continuing to build the programme of support and training opportunities for researchers.
- Review of performance management process with new training on how to manage your review session.
- Supporting the school-led Academic Mentoring Programme launched in October 2022.