

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

Name of Institution	Heriot-Watt University
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Universities and Research Institutes

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*)

Aligning with our university values, we seek to embed an enterprising research culture that promotes a sense of connectedness and belonging across the whole research community, celebrates holistic research success, enables collaboration, and inspires the research community to do and support the best research they can do, and be the best researchers they can be.

Since 2022, we have been on a transformative journey to develop and implement initiatives to ensure we make significant and measurable progress in creating an enterprising and inclusive research culture.

Following the appointment of a three-year post of **Associate Principal for Research Culture and People** in 2022, we launched a targeted initiative to strengthen and develop our research culture, building on existing strengths, while addressing ongoing challenges.

A **Research Culture Working Group** was established and brought together representatives from every School and career stage and guided work in this area through 12 meetings over 2.5 years. Our **Research Culture Champions Network** includes 17 champions across all Schools and campuses, recognising and amplifying grassroots efforts to foster a positive research culture.

Working together, an extensive consultation across all our Schools, campuses, and countries, a comprehensive **Research Culture Action Plan** was co-designed and launched in June 2024. It focuses on **five key themes: Collegiality, Research Reward & Recognition, Research Careers, Open Research, and Research Integrity**. It was devised in consultation with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) team and there is close alignment with the HWU Athena Swan Action Plan, ensuring that underrepresented groups are supported. The plan features short, medium, and long-term goals, aligned with community feedback and supported by measurable indicators to track progress.

Despite a challenging financial climate, we have safeguarded investment in our researcher development programme to ensure we continue to grow and develop this area.

Further steps to establish a **Research Futures Hub** have been key. It is designed to support the career development of Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) and Early Career Researchers (ECRs). The hub provides a structured framework with which we can enhance career progression, foster networking, and ensure an equitable experience throughout the PGR lifecycle, from admission to graduation.

Supporting this and wider research culture work, in February 2025, the **Research Culture Enhancement Fund** was launched to support researchers, academics, technical and professional services colleagues and PGR students.

The launch of the **HWU Research Culture Manifesto** in June 2025 marked a new phase, inviting all members of our research community to pledge their support.

In July 2025, we completed the **Evaluation Report for our Research Culture Action Plan**. The findings highlight significant improvements in institutional engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, recognition practices, and community-building.

The report called for a renewed focus on local ownership as critical to maintaining momentum. To this end, it is our Schools who are now taking on greater responsibility for ensuring that research culture becomes a deeply embedded feature of the University's research and enterprising environment. This is an important step in ensuring that research culture is truly owned and driven by our whole community.

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. Improve 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 new and existing tailored training resources and promote the new coaching offer, revised PGR Supervisor training and updated PDR workflow across Schools.

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

#### **3. Promote Equity and Representation**

*Implementation:* Continue to engage the Research Champions Network in research activity and events, and prioritise applications to the Research Culture Enhancement Fund (RCEF) which are from or work to support Early Career Researchers (ECRs).

*Measurement:* Monitor participation diversity in training and event programmes; evaluate RCEF, and collect and review case-studies.

#### **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. Maintain strong EDI focus on RCEF. Encourage 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, run ‘How to effectively Induct New Colleagues’ sessions for managers, keep the SharePoint area updated, and streamline guidance and support tools for managers.

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

**7. Promote Research Excellence Recognition**

*Implementation:* Host annual events such as Research in Action Week and Research Integrity and 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 Programme**

*Implementation:* Appointed a dedicated Researcher Development Consultant in November 2025, to develop a new mid-senior career programme, including training on leadership, impact, and research integrity.

*Measurement:* Measure programme 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:* Keep up-to-date the HWU Sharepoint providing accessible resources showcasing career pathways and development opportunities. Implement the HWU British

<p>Sign Language Local Plan for 2024-2030 by expanding BSL information accessibility and providing interpreters for all RED training and Culture Café offerings.  <i>Measurement:</i> Monitor webpage usage, user feedback, and the impact on career progression rates.</p>	
<p>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]</p>	
<p>Environment and Culture (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p><a href="#">See attached table (Appendix 1)</a></p>
<p>Employment (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p><a href="#">See attached table (Appendix 1)</a></p>
<p>Professional development (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p><a href="#">See attached table (Appendix 1)</a></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. (<i>max 500 words</i>)</p>	
<p><b>Lessons Learned</b></p> <p>In July 2025, we completed our Enterprising Research Culture Evaluation Report, which provided a comprehensive analysis of Heriot-Watt University's (HWU) progress in</p>	

fostering a positive, inclusive, and enterprising research culture through the implementation of Our Enterprising Research Culture Action Plan (launched June 2024). The evaluation was framed by the Action Plan structure, which aligned with five priority themes: Collegiality, Research Recognition, Research Careers, Open Research, and Research Integrity.

Grounded in a participatory and iterative approach, the evaluation drew on qualitative and quantitative data gathered across multiple initiatives, consultations, funding programmes, events and strategic activities.

A bespoke Research Culture Indicators Rubric was developed and utilised, modelled on the NCCPE EDGE Tool, allowing us to determine how much research culture (RC) has embedded at HWU.

Overall, the report affirmed that HWU has transitioned from embryonic to gripping stages in many areas, though no theme is yet fully embedded. The findings highlight significant improvements in institutional engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, recognition practices, and community-building—while also identifying systemic and operational challenges to sustained cultural transformation.

#### **Key Emerging Themes and Areas for Action**

- **Growing Engagement and Culture Shifts Across the Institution**

Engagement in RC activities has significantly increased, with participation across campuses and career stages. Initiatives such as the Research Culture Enhancement Fund, Narrative CV workshops, and interdisciplinary research events have demonstrably fostered collaboration and innovation.

- **Value of Localised and Bottom-Up Approaches**

Embedding RC practices at School, Department, and research group/lab levels has proven essential. Champions and local leads have successfully driven forward community-building efforts, reflecting a maturing understanding of distributed leadership in research culture.

- **Need for Strategic Consistency and Infrastructure**

While many activities have taken hold, sustainability requires investment in systems, clear role expectations (e.g. Champions, AEDs), and improved visibility of institutional policy frameworks (e.g. for ethics, recognition, and open research).

- **Recognition and Reward Mechanisms are Maturing**

Efforts to embed inclusive recognition practices—such as new promotion pathways and PURE usage are taking effect but remain gripping rather than embedded. Researchers call

for consistency in application across Schools and greater acknowledgement of team science and EDI-informed contributions.

- **Persistent Challenges Around Equity and Inclusion**

Issues such as workload disparities, access to collaborative space, precarious employment for ECRs, and information overload remain. Embedding EDI principles in everyday research practices continues to require active monitoring and targeted action.

- **Positive Impact vs Inconsistent Uptake**

While the evidence demonstrates impact, particularly in collaboration and morale, the degree of uptake and awareness varies. Communication, leadership engagement, and institutional incentives must be enhanced to ensure consistency.

**Next Steps**

The evaluation confirms that HWU's Action Plan has catalysed significant progress across the institution, with many activities now gripping but not yet embedded. Sustained leadership commitment, structural investment, and a renewed focus on local ownership are critical to maintain momentum and ensure that RC becomes a deeply embedded feature of the University's research and enterprising environment. The evaluation report outlined a series of recommendations to update the Action Plan, which have been picked up by central strategic structures.

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 2026 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.

The next phase of work will see us drive local ownership, building on success and momentum of current work. Key objectives will focus on the three 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. A key investment will be in the continued development of the Research Culture Enhancement Fund. 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, by fostering growth, excellence, and innovation across our research community.

### **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. Work to improve induction, strengthen people management, and enhance ways of working is ongoing.

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, providing enhanced online resources on career pathways, and further embedding an Open Research framework to promote inclusivity and engagement and increase awareness and understanding of Open Research practice.

By addressing these objectives, our 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 and Enterprise Strategy Programme Manager in consultation with relevant colleagues and the Global Director of Research Engagement.

The report will be considered for approval at the meeting of the University Committee for Research and Innovation (UCRI) in January 2026, whose membership includes Directors of Research and Enterprise. If approved, it will then be considered at the University Executive and then go to the University Court for final approval.

Signature on behalf of governing body: Professor Chris Turney, Deputy Principal Research and Impact.



Contact for queries: [ResearchFutures@hw.ac.uk](mailto:ResearchFutures@hw.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](http://www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk).