

## Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan

This paper updates the Committee on progress against the SFC's Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan and revisions to the action plan in the light of planned Review implementation work.

### Recommendations

The Committee is invited to:

- Note progress made against the previous SFC Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan action plan.
- Approve changes to the revised action plan in the light of SFC's recently published Review report [Coherence and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research](#).

### Financial implications

No immediate financial implications have been identified.

## Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan

### Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to update the committee on progress against the draft SFC Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan and request its approval of changes to the action plan in light of the recently published SFC Review report [Coherence and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research](#)<sup>1</sup>.
2. This is paper is for noting and approval.

### Background

3. The SFC is a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (the Researcher Development Concordat). This [Concordat](#)<sup>2</sup> is a statement setting out the expectations and responsibilities of researchers, their managers, employers and funders in relation to career development. It aims to increase the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK and to improve the quantity, quality and impact of research for the benefit of UK society and the economy.
4. In December 2020, the committee provided feedback on a draft version of the Researcher Development action plan. Further planned work on finalising and implementing this plan was delayed due to the pandemic and planned related work being undertaken as part of SFC's Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability.
5. As part of SFC's Review work, significant consideration has been given to the area of researcher development and many of the principles contained within the Concordat. In light of recommendations published within the Review report, it now makes sense for the Concordat action plan to be updated and, where possible, for actions outlined within the previous action plan to be incorporated into forthcoming Review implementation work. This will reduce the chance of work being unnecessarily duplicated and ensure full integration of the Concordat principles within SFC policies and processes.

### Progress against Concordat principles

6. SFC progress against the Concordat principles has been listed in the table in Annex A.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/review/review.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat-to-support-the-career-development-of-researchers>

## **Revised Action Plan**

7. A revised draft of the SFC's Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan is provided as Annex A to this paper. The plan has been significantly reformulated to allow previously planned work to be incorporated into Review implementation work.
8. This action plan is intended as an interim plan until relevant Review implementation work has been completed, and as such, much of the contextualising detail provided in the previous action plan has been stripped back, to focus on work that can be carried out within the context of the Review. Once Review implementation plans have been finalised, this information will be updated and added back into the action plan.
9. The revised plan shows the specific actions SFC will take to meet its obligations as both a signatory and a funder under the Researcher Development Concordat.

## **Risk assessment**

10. Work undertaken to develop the researcher development agenda has the potential to lead to wide scale changes in research culture and the research environment. Given the potential scale of this change, there is a risk of unforeseen and unintended consequences, some of which could be negative. For this reason, it will be important that an evidence-based approach is used, and that changes are monitored to minimise the risk of unintended negative consequences of any changes that are made.
11. On this basis it is suggested that this work is a medium risk at this time.

## **Equality and diversity assessment**

12. Equality impact assessments will be undertaken as part of any review implementation plans.

## **Financial implications**

13. This paper does not have any immediate financial implications for the SFC. No additional costs are anticipated in incorporating proposed actions into review implementation work.

## **Recommendations**

14. The Committee is invited to:
  - **Note** progress made against the Researcher Development Concordat principles

- **Approve** changes to the revised SFC Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan in the light of SFC's recently published Review report [Coherence and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research](#).

### **Publication**

15. This paper will be published on the Council website.

### **Further information**

16. Contact: Dr Charlotte Matheson, Policy/Analysis Officer, tel: 0131 313 6650, email: [cmatheson@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:cmatheson@sfc.ac.uk).

## Revised Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan

The following plan outlines actions taken against the core funder and signatory requirements outlined in the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, and recommended future actions (including review recommendations). Funder requirements are divided into three sections:

- a) Environment.
- b) Employment.
- c) Professional and career development.

For clarity, SFC Review recommendations have been listed in *blue italics*.

### A. Funder requirements – Environment

	Funder requirements	Actions taken	Recommended Actions/ <i>Review Recommendations</i>	Timeframe	Measures of success
1	Include requirements which promote equitable, inclusive and positive research cultures and environments, in relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting, and policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research culture and environment issues considered as part of SFC Review.</li> <li>• EIA assessment required for all SFC funding calls.</li> <li>• Outcome agreements require adherence to Concordat as a condition of grant.</li> <li>• SFC is an active member of the National Forum on Tackling Bullying and Harassment in R&amp;I.</li> <li>• SFC covid-19 mitigation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>SFC will commission the sector to develop a blueprint for establishing a positive research culture in Scotland and instigate a broader debate that explores and defines good practice.</i> This will be used to inform requirements promoting positive research cultures in funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting and policies.</li> <li>• Continue to engage with work of National Forum and contribute to its activities.</li> <li>• Update NCPFG proposal guidance to prompt consideration of Concordats in funding calls, terms and conditions, and grant reporting for non-core funds.</li> </ul>	<p>Review work: TBD.</p> <p>National Forum work: ongoing.</p> <p>NCPFG: August 2021</p>	Requirements which demonstrably align with Concordat principles successfully incorporated into relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting and policies.

		<p>funding announced in 2020 and 2021 took Concordat principles into account, with specific emphasis on reducing inequality of opportunity across protected characteristics and providing support for PhD students and PDRAs on fixed term contracts.</p>			
2	<p>Consider how funding opportunities and policies can facilitate different patterns and ways of working, and promote the wellbeing and mental health of researchers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research culture and environment considered as part of SFC Review.</li> <li>• SFC covid-19 mitigation funding announced in 2020 and 2021 took Concordat principles into account, with specific emphasis on reducing inequality of opportunity across protected characteristics and providing support for PhD students and PDRAs on fixed term contracts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>SFC will commission the sector to develop a blueprint for establishing a positive research culture in Scotland and instigate a broader debate that explores and defines good practice.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Review work: TBD.</p>	<p>Good researcher development practice defined and incorporated within SFC policies and practices.</p>
3	<p>Ensure that funding call requirements and selection processes offer equality of opportunity between different groups of researchers, recognise personal contexts, and promote positive research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EDI considered as part of SFC Review</li> <li>• Outcome agreements require adherence to Concordat as a condition of grant.</li> <li>• SFC covid-19 mitigation funding announced in 2020 and 2021 took Concordat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>SFC will commission the sector to develop a blueprint for establishing a positive research culture in Scotland and instigate a broader debate that explores and defines good practice.</i></li> </ul>		<p>Good practice in researcher development practice (including EDI considerations) defined and incorporated into SFC funding call</p>

	cultures and working conditions.	principles into account, with specific emphasis on reducing inequality of opportunity across protected characteristics and providing support for PhD students and PDRAs on fixed term contracts.			requirements and selection processes.
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### B. Funder Requirements - Employment

	Funder requirements	Actions taken	Recommended Actions/ <i>Review Recommendations</i>	Timeframe	Measures of success
1	Include requirements which support the improvement of working conditions for researchers, in relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting, and policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research culture and environment considered as part of SFC Review.</li> <li>• Outcome agreements require adherence to Concordat as a condition of grant.</li> <li>• SFC is an active member of the National Forum on Tackling Bullying and Harassment in R&amp;I.</li> <li>• SFC covid-19 mitigation funding announced in 2020 and 2021 took Concordat principles into account, with specific emphasis on reducing inequality of opportunity across protected characteristics and providing support for PhD students and PDRAs on fixed term</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>We recommend that we introduce reporting on the impact of basic research investment and associated spillover benefits, and share good practice and case studies.</i></li> <li>• Continue to engage with work of National Forum and contribute to its activities</li> <li>• Update NCPFG proposal guidance to prompt consideration of Concordats in funding calls, terms and conditions, and grant reporting for non-core funds.</li> </ul>	<p>Review work: TBD.</p> <p>National Forum work: ongoing.</p> <p>NCPFG: August 2021.</p>	Requirements which demonstrably align with Concordat principles successfully incorporated into relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting and policies.

		contracts.			
2	Review the impact of relevant funding call requirements on researchers' employment, particularly in relation to career progression and lack of job security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment conditions, career progression and job security issues considered as part of SFC review work.</li> <li>• SFC covid-19 mitigation funding announced in 2020 and 2021 took Concordat principles into account, with specific emphasis on reducing inequality of opportunity across protected characteristics and providing support for PhD students and PDRAs on fixed term contracts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>SFC will commission the sector to develop a blueprint for establishing a positive research culture in Scotland and instigate a broader debate that explores and defines good practice.</i></li> <li>• <i>We recommend that we introduce reporting on the impact of basic research investment and associated spillover benefits, and share good practice and case studies.</i></li> <li>• Engage with other funders (e.g. UKRI) and relevant stakeholders regarding their work within this space to standardise processes and expectations</li> </ul>	Review work: TBD.  Engagement with other funders: ongoing and as appropriate.	Good researcher development practice defined and incorporated within SFC policies and practices.
3	Support institutions to develop policies and frameworks to promote sustainable employment arrangements and enhance job security, and provide opportunities for career progression.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment conditions, career progression and job security issues considered as part of SFC review work.</li> <li>• SFC covid-19 mitigation funding announced in 2020 and 2021 took Concordat principles into account, with specific emphasis on reducing inequality of opportunity across protected characteristics and providing support for PhD students and PDRAs on fixed term contracts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>SFC will commission the sector to develop a blueprint for establishing a positive research culture in Scotland and instigate a broader debate that explores and defines good practice.</i></li> <li>• <i>We recommend that we introduce reporting on the impact of basic research investment and associated spillover benefits, and share good practice and case studies.</i></li> <li>• <i>We recommend better ways to support the postgraduate research student experience by:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>a) Introducing greater accountability from institutions for our Research Postgraduate Grant (RPG).</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Review work: TBD.	Good researcher development practice defined and incorporated within SFC policies and practices.  Evidence developed on value of PGRs to our economy and society and used to inform SFC policy and practice.

			<p><i>b) Restating the purpose of the RPG to include support for postgraduates to acquire the skills to develop careers in or outside of academia, and to support collaboration between universities in areas of researcher support and development.</i></p> <p><i>c) Articulating better the value of postgraduate researchers (PGRs) to our economy and society, inside and out with academia. This will link to work underway within UKRI.</i></p> <p><i>d) Building our evidence base, and exploring how we can better track the destinations of early career researchers trained in Scotland, as part of articulating the value that PGRs bring to our society and economy.</i></p> <p><i>e) Creating a national Graduate School programme by consolidating our current support across many strands of activity in this area to develop communities that foster collaboration and a positive culture.</i></p>		
4	Consider the balance of their relevant funding streams in providing access to research funding and its impact at all career levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considered as part of SFC review work, and REG/RPG review work.</li> <li>• SFC covid-19 mitigation funding announced in 2020 and 2021 took Concordat principles into account, with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>SFC will commission the sector to develop a blueprint for establishing a positive research culture in Scotland and instigate a broader debate that explores and defines good practice.</i></li> <li>• REG/RPG review work is currently ongoing within this space.</li> </ul>	Review work: TBD.	

		specific emphasis on reducing inequality of opportunity across protected characteristics and providing support for PhD students and PDRAs on fixed term contracts.			
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### C. Funder Requirements - Professional and career development

	Funder requirements	Actions taken	Recommended Actions/ <i>Review Recommendations</i>	Timeframe	Measures of success
1	Incorporate specific professional development requirements in relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting, and policies. This should include researchers' engagement in a minimum of 10 days' professional development pro rata per year, and evidence of effective career development planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outcome agreements require adherence to Concordat as a condition of grant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update NCPFG proposal guidance to prompt consideration of Concordats in funding calls, terms and conditions, and grant reporting for non-core funds.</li> </ul>	August 2021	Requirements which demonstrably align with Concordat principles successfully incorporated into relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting and policies.
2	Embed the Concordat Principles and researcher development into research assessment strategies and processes.	n/a – SFC not involved in research project funding	n/a	n/a	n/a
3	Acknowledge that a large proportion of the researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Considered as part of SFC review work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>SFC will commission the sector to develop a blueprint for establishing a positive</i></li> </ul>	Review work: TBD	Good researcher development

<p>they fund will move on to careers beyond academia, and consider how they can encourage and support this within their remit.</p>		<p><i>research culture in Scotland and instigate a broader debate that explores and defines good practice.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>We recommend that we introduce reporting on the impact of basic research investment and associated spillover benefits, and share good practice and case studies.</i></li> <li>• <i>We recommend developing better ways to support the postgraduate research student experience by:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>a) Introducing greater accountability from institutions for our Research Postgraduate Grant (RPG).</i></li> <li><i>b) Restating the purpose of the RPG to include support for postgraduates to acquire the skills to develop careers in or outside of academia, and to support collaboration between universities in areas of researcher support and development.</i></li> <li><i>c) Articulating better the value of postgraduate researchers (PGRs) to our economy and society, inside and out with academia. This will link to work underway within UKRI.</i></li> <li><i>d) Building our evidence base, and exploring how we can better track the destinations of early career researchers trained in Scotland, as part of articulating the value that PGRs bring to our society and economy.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>practice defined and incorporated within SFC policies and practices. Evidence developed on value of PGRs to our economy and society and used to inform SFC policy and practice.</p>
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			<i>e) Creating a national Graduate School programme by consolidating our current support across many strands of activity in this area to develop communities that foster collaboration and a positive culture.</i>		
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#### D. Signatory Requirements

	<b>Signatory Responsibilities</b>	<b>Actions taken</b>	<b>Recommended Actions/<i>Review Recommendations</i></b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Measures of success</b>
1.	Raise the visibility of the Concordat and champion its Principles within their organisation at all levels.	SFC webpage makes a public commitment to the Concordat.  Outcome agreement guidance includes requirement to comply with Concordat.	Incorporate Concordat principles into relevant Review implementation work.	Review: TBD	SFC's commitment to the concordat is embedded in policy and practice and visible across the organisation.
2.	Identify a senior manager champion and associated group with relevant representation from across the organisation with responsibility for annual review and reporting on progress.	Dr Cat Ball appointed as Senior Manager Champion, to ensure integration with review implementation work. Research team within R&I directorate responsible for producing annual review. Progress reporting done via OA process.	R&I research team to coordinate across SFC to produce annual review and reporting on progress.	Yearly	Annual review published yearly on SFC website.
3.	For organisations employing researchers, ensure that they are formally represented in developing and monitoring	n/a	Review as appropriate	Ongoing	

	organisational efforts to implement the Concordat Principles.				
4.	Undertake a gap analysis to compare their policies and practice against the Concordat Principles.		<p>Incorporate Concordat into policy and process documents as part of review implementation work.</p> <p>Following this, research team to schedule regular review of SFC policies/processes to ensure compliance with Concordat.</p>	<p>Review work: TBD</p> <p>Review of policies: yearly, to feed into annual statement.</p>	SFC policies and practice are aligned with Concordat principles.
5.	Draw up and publish an action plan within a year of signing up to Concordat.	Draft action plan presented to RKEC in December 2020.	Publish revised action plan on SFC website.	August 2021, with revised plan published after relevant review implementation work complete	Action plan published and clearly visible on SFC website.
6.	Set up processes for systematically and regularly gathering the views of the researchers they fund or employ, to inform and improve the organisation's approach to and progress on implementing the Concordat.	n/a – researchers not directly funded/employed via SFC	n/a	n/a	n/a
7.	Produce an annual report to their governing body or equivalent authority, which includes their strategic objectives, measures of success, implementation	Revised action plan, including progress against Concordat principles presented to RKEC in August 2021, updated in line with SFC review recommendations.	<p>Present annual report to RKEC and publish report on SFC website.</p> <p>Revise implementation plan following review implementation work.</p>	<p>Annual report: Yearly</p> <p>Updated action plan: TBD</p>	Annual report, including strategic objectives, measures of success, implementation

	plan and progress, which is subsequently publicly available.				plan and progress publicly available on SFC website.
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