
RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT CONCORDAT ACTION PLAN

PURPOSE

1. To provide an annual progress report against the current SFC Researcher Development (RD) Concordat Action Plan, in line with SFC's requirements as a signatory to the concordat.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Committee is invited to:
 - Note progress against the revised SFC RD Concordat Action Plan from August 2021 to July 2022, as outlined in the annual report in [Annex A](#).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3. The UK funding bodies provide funding to UUK for an enhanced secretariat function for the Concordat Governance. This ensures a reporting line from the Concordat governance into the funding bodies and a route into respective governments, as recommended in the review of the previous version of the Concordat. SFC contributed £28,925 across FY 2020-21 and 2021-22 to this purpose. This included UUK secretariat costs and costs to support a Vitae good practice repository. Costs for FY 2022-23 are yet to be confirmed but are expected to be at a similar level.

RISK ASSESSMENT

4. The proposed actions represent a low risk. However, as a public signatory to the concordat, there is a much higher risk if SFC policies, processes and actions are not shown to be in alignment with RD Concordat principles.

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

5. Individual Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out for specific pieces of future work listed in the action plan.

ISLAND COMMUNITIES

6. An Island Communities Impact Assessment will be carried out for specific pieces of future work listed in the action plan.

CARBON REDUCTION

7. No direct links to the Scottish Government's priorities for carbon reduction and the achievement of 'net-zero' by 2045 have been identified.

PUBLICATION

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

FURTHER INFORMATION

9. Contact: Dr Charlotte Matheson, Policy/Analysis Officer, tel: 0131 313 6650, email: cmatheson@sfc.ac.uk.

RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT CONCORDAT ACTION PLAN

PURPOSE

10. To provide an annual progress report against the current [SFC Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan](#), in line with SFC's requirements as a signatory to the concordat. This paper is for noting.

BACKGROUND

11. SFC became a signatory to the revised Researcher Development Concordat in September 2019 and is a member of the Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group.
12. The Concordat aims to improve the employment and support for researchers and researcher careers in higher education in the UK. It sets out three clear Principles of environment and culture, employment, and professional and career development. The principles are underpinned by obligations for the four key stakeholder groups, funders, institutions, researchers and managers of researchers, to realise the aims of the Concordat.
13. In August 2021, a revised SFC Researcher Development Action Plan was presented to SFC RKEC (RKEC/21/15). This updated plan linked planned SFC Review implementation work with SFC's obligations under the principles of the Concordat. Further updates on RD concordat work were included in the Update on People and Culture paper presented in June (RKEC/22/11).
14. As a signatory to the Researcher Development Concordat, SFC is required to produce a one- to two-page annual report on progress against its action plan. This report is provided as Annex A and will be published separately on the SFC Researcher Development webpage.

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES AND OPTIONS

15. Three key strategic objectives were identified in this reporting year, based on commitments outlined in the [Action Plan](#). These were to:
 - Incorporate Concordat principles into relevant [SFC Review](#) implementation work;
 - Embed RD Concordat principles into other SFC policies and processes;

- Ensure Scottish representation on and active engagement with RD Concordat groups and activities.
16. In line with RD Concordat requirements, the annual report at Annex A provides a summary of actions implemented to meet these objectives, measures of success, proposals for improvement, learnings from progress and a forward look to actions for the following year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

17. The Committee is invited to:
- Note progress against the revised SFC Researcher Development Action Plan from August 2021 to July 2022, as outlined in the annual report in Annex A.

ANNEX A: SFC RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT CONCORDAT ANNUAL REPORT 2022

SFC STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR THE REPORTING YEAR

18. SFC's Researcher Development (RD) Concordat-related strategic objectives for the reporting year August 2021-July 2022 have been listed in the table below, alongside activities undertaken to meet these objectives and measures of success.

Strategic objective	Activities implemented to meet objective	Measures of success
Incorporate Concordat principles into relevant SFC Review implementation work.	New Alliances for Research Challenges (ARCs) have been designed with requirements to contribute towards positive research culture and provide ECR support.	Research culture and ECR support focuses are built into full proposal requirements for ARCs .
	Data gathering on the PGR landscape carried out by SFC intern as background to research culture work.	Mapping the Scottish PGR Landscape report and WonkHE blog published June 2022.
	Call for applications for SFC Advisory Group published May 2022. Group will provide SFC with recommendations regarding ways to foster collaboration and support positive research culture with a focus on PGR support and development in Scotland.	Strong sector engagement, with over 70 high-quality membership applications received. Group members were announced in August 2022.
Embed RD Concordat principles into other SFC policies and processes.	SFC Offer of Grant templates updated to incorporate standard conditions on researcher development.	Researcher development conditions added as standard to relevant SFC Offers of Grant.
	Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant consultation sought	31 responses received; informed decision to

	sector feedback on balance of core research grants.	retain current RPG/REG funding balance.
Ensure Scottish representation on and active engagement with RD Concordat groups and activities.	Continued engagement through SFC representation on signatories' group, associated task and finish groups and contribution to 2022 Research Culture and Practice Forum (bringing together topics from the RD Concordat and Research Integrity Concordat).	SFC representation on RD Concordat groups ensures Scotland-specific issues considered within their activities and discussions. Contribution to annual forum highlighted Scotland's R&I culture policy landscape and activity to a UK-wide audience.

PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT

19. Going forward, SFC aims to ensure greater visibility and promotion of RD Concordat-linked activities and related work, as well as undertaking further data gathering work to identify ways in which SFC can support evidence-based good practice in relation to the principles of the RD Concordat.

LEARNINGS FROM PROGRESS

20. Through initiatives such as the new PGR Advisory Group, we have learnt that there is strong, sector-wide interest across Scotland in research culture, and opportunities for SFC to tap into existing expertise to support our own work. We need to ensure that this is done in a way that does not duplicate existing effort or create additional bureaucracy.
21. Finding ways to include concordat principles into standard processes (such as a standard condition in letters of grant) ensures a consistency of approach, and there may be scope to explore further ways of doing this within our existing processes.

FORWARD LOOK TO ACTIONS FOR 2022-23

22. Work on the ARCs Stage 2 process will involve consideration of how ARCs can be shaped to incorporate RD Concordat Principles.
23. The SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers will provide

opportunities for SFC to receive advice on ways to support researchers and on evidence gathering to further support work in this area, particularly through implementation of our Review's recommendation to enhance accountability for the RPG.

24. SFC's ongoing work to develop our assurance framework and National Impact Framework provide opportunities to embed RD Concordat principles.
25. Dr Cat Ball has been invited to represent SFC on the Concordats and Agreements Review (CAR) Phase 2 external advisory group, running from September to November 2022.
26. Through analysis and work with the Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group, we aim to gain understanding of how Scottish institutions compare with the rest of the UK in terms of key trends and issues identified through their annual reporting.
27. SFC will aim to update its Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan once further progress on Review implementation work relating to research culture is underway.