

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

Funders and Regulators

Name of Institution	Scottish Funding Council
Reporting period	August 2023 – July 2024
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Web address of annual report	Researcher development - Scottish Funding Council (sfc.ac.uk)
Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	Researcher development - Scottish Funding Council (sfc.ac.uk)
Contact for questions/concerns on researcher career development	Dr Charlotte Matheson, Senior Policy Officer, Research and Innovation, email: cmatheson@sfc.ac.uk
Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk	November 2024

Please provide a statement describing your organisation's funding / regulatory status, and approach to supporting and embedding positive and inclusive research environments (max 500 words).

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is Scotland's tertiary education and research authority. We invest around £2 billion a year to support Scotland's 19 universities and 26 colleges deliver a world-leading system of tertiary education, research and innovation that enables students to flourish, changes lives for the better, and supports social, economic and environmental wellbeing and prosperity.

We support the competitiveness of Scotland's research base through a range of investments and the training and development of postgraduate teaching and research students. We aim to develop and sustain a dynamic and internationally competitive research sector that makes a major contribution to economic prosperity, national wellbeing and the expansion of knowledge.

SFC does not fund individual researchers directly – our core grants for research (the Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant) are allocated to universities. SFC agree with individual institutions what they will deliver with the funding they receive from SFC through the yearly Outcome Agreement process. From AY 2024-25 Outcome Agreements will be replaced by the Outcome Framework & Assurance Model incorporating Research Assurance and Accountability (RAA).

Provide a short summary of the organisation'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) together with your measures for evaluating progress and success (*max 600 words*)

SFC's strategic plan for 2022-27 sets out our strategic objectives, including;

Generating new ideas and diffusing knowledge: To invest in excellent research and innovation that advances current knowledge; attracts and nurtures talent and entrepreneurship; mobilises collaboration and additional investment; enhances our international reputation; and delivers economic transformation and societal value.

Priority 2.2 beneath this objective sets out our commitment to promoting “a supportive research culture for talented people and teams, including the co-design with the sector of relevant expectations.”

We have refreshed our Researcher Development Concordat action plan from AY2024-25 and this is available on our website [Researcher development - Scottish Funding Council \(sfc.ac.uk\)](https://www.sfc.ac.uk/researcher-development)

SFC has a two pronged approach to addressing our commitments as a signatory to the Concordat.

Assurance

As previously noted, we monitor Scottish HEI alignment with RD Concordat principles through Outcome Agreements (RAA from 24-25). From AY 2023/24, all institutions are required to provide a research culture and environment statement. This includes, but is not limited to, areas such as: promoting open research; valuing a broad range of research outputs, including civic and public engagement; promoting reproducibility; and supporting and empowering research-enabling staff.

As part of the Outcome Agreement process we ask institutions to outline what they are doing in practice to deliver Fair Work for their employees, noting that this is a condition of funding.

Where appropriate SFC funded strategic projects are required to consider how they align to the principles of the Research Development Concordat as a condition of grant.

Measures of success will include:

- Requirements which demonstrably align with Concordat principles successfully incorporated into relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting and policies.
- Assurance that all Scottish HEIs are aligned with RD Concordat principles and act in accordance with Scottish Government's Fair Work guidance.

- All SFC funded strategic projects are aligned to the Concordat principles and act in accordance with the Scottish Government's Fair Work guidance.

Sector engagement

SFC is committed to working with the sector and other stakeholders to better understand existing barriers and opportunities and explore ways in which we can support research culture across Scottish institutions. Regular sector/ stakeholder engagements include: the Universities Scotland Researcher Development and Culture Committee, the forum for Tackling Bullying and Harassment, the RD Concordat and Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Groups, SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers (2022-24) and the REF 2029 Steering Group.

Measures of success will include:

- Better understanding of good researcher development practise and barriers and opportunities.
- Sector supported to work collaboratively to maximise impact.

Summary of actions taken (including changes to relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting and policies in relation to host organisations and/or grant applicants), and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars (*max 600 words*)

As set out above institutions were required to demonstrate alignment to RDC commitments, Scottish Government's Fair Work Policy and to submit a statement on research culture through the Outcome Agreement process in 2023-24.

SFC have worked with the Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers and an Expert Sector Working Group to evaluate and refine assurance and accountability requirements for Researcher Postgraduate Grant (RPG) and Research Excellence Grant (REG) respectively.

RPG – We have re-stated the principles of RPG to include support for postgraduates to acquire the skills to develop careers in or outside of academia. We have developed guidance for increased RPG assurance and accountability, from 2024-25 institutions will be required to set high level outcomes which they will report against in future years and will be required to submit case studies on use of RPG.

REG – From 2024-25 will be required to submit additional information on governance and accountability of REG and will continue to submit case studies demonstrating the impact of REG.

Drawing on information in Outcome Agreements and from sector engagements SFC have scoped plans for a Scottish Research Culture Co-ordinator position which will work with all Scottish universities to support national research culture initiatives, improve sharing of best practise and encourage collaborative action to maximise impact across the sector.

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
(max 500 words)

Through consultation with the sector we are aware that:

- There is strong willingness for collaboration within the Research Culture space in Scotland – this has influenced SFC plans for a Research Culture Co-ordinator and we will continue to look for ways to encourage and facilitate co-ordinated action;
- Scottish universities currently feel at a disadvantage in relation to their English counterparts in the research culture space, given that English universities have been provided with earmarked Research England funding for research culture work, with no equivalent funding in Scotland – this influenced SFC decision to allocate additional funding in AY2024-25 through REG with supporting excellent research environment and positive research cultures encouraged as a focus.

Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period
(max 500 words)

We have refreshed our Researcher Development Concordat action plan from AY2024-25 and this is available on our website [Researcher development - Scottish Funding Council \(sfc.ac.uk\)](https://www.sfc.ac.uk/researcher-development)

SFC will continue to seek assurance of institutions alignment with RDC commitments and Scottish Governments Fair Work policy through the Research Assurance and Accountability framework.

SFC will continue to work with the sector to better understand ways in which we can support positive research cultures across Scottish institutions, including through support for a Research Culture Co-ordinator position and through added value activities associated with the RAA.

SFC will continue to contribute to development of the assessment of People, Culture and Environment within REF 2029 in consultation with sector to reflect Concordat principles.

Please provide a brief statement describing your organisation's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body or equivalent authority (*max 200 words*)

This report will be presented to the August 2024 meeting of SFC's Research and Knowledge Exchange committee for approval. The Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee has a role to respond to, recommend and advise the Council on research and knowledge exchange strategy, policy and funding issues relevant to Scottish HE institutions and colleges.

Signature on behalf of governing body / equivalent authority:

Approved by SFC RKEC on 24 August 2024

Contact for queries: Dr Charlotte Matheson, Senior Policy Officer, Research and Innovation, email: cmatheson@sfc.ac.uk.