



Abertay
University®

OUTCOME AGREEMENT 2023-24

October 2023

Annexes:

Annex A: National measures

Approved by Court 29 November 2023



A: CONTEXT

This outcome agreement for 2023-24 sets out the ways in which Abertay University will continue to contribute to the national aims and priorities for higher education in Scotland during this academic year. It builds on our previous outcome agreements, and our current Strategic Plan and associated operational plans. The structure reflects the guidance issued by SFC and sets out our contribution to the 7 Priority Areas for Fair access and transitions, Quality learning and teaching, Coherent learning provision, Work-based learning and skills, Net zero and environmental sustainability response, High-quality research and innovation, and the University Innovation Fund (UIF).

This outcome agreement builds on our existing strengths. We would like to highlight in particular:

- Our continued commitment to, and strong performance in, widening access to higher education. 19% of our 2023-24 Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants (SDUE) came from SIMD20 postcode areas, or experienced educational disadvantage (as recognised by our contextual admissions policy) prior to coming to Abertay.
- The continued high levels of articulation with full credit into our undergraduate programmes, with 49% of our SDUE articulating with full credit onto years 2 or 3 of an Abertay degree in 2023-24.
- Our continued commitment to equality and diversity: we were the first in 2017 and are to date one of only two universities in Scotland to achieve the Race Equality Charter Mark bronze award, re-awarded in 2021. Abertay holds a Bronze Award under the Advance HE Athena Swan Charter.

Our focus in 2023-24 is on:

- Academic priorities including student retention.
- Student recruitment, both home and international.
- Ensuring long-term financial stability by generating additional income through online and international partnerships.
- Continuing to deliver our agreed estates and digital transformation projects.

However, the current funding environment is extremely challenging. Continuing real-terms cuts in SFC funding per student place at risk our ability to continue to deliver the excellent student experience we are known for and which we aspire to in this outcome agreement. Maintaining financial sustainability remains the highest priority for the University, but the reality is that without changes to the SFC funding model, we will have to continue to prioritise activities which will generate additional income for the University in the future and will be unable in the immediate future to invest to support staff and students in all the ways that we would wish to do so.

In developing this outcome agreement, we have consulted with the Students' Association and with our trade unions. The unions have raised serious concerns that without changes to the funding model our ability to deliver on our Outcome Agreement commitments may be restricted, noting that the effects on staff of the real-terms funding reductions was a key issue in recent industrial action.

This document was considered and approved by our Court at its meeting on 29 November 2023.

Priority area 1: Fair access and transitions

Fair access and transitions

Improving access to higher education and continuing to ensure that we recruit students from a diverse range of backgrounds remain priorities for Abertay. Our approach to access to education reflects the strong sense of social mission felt by the Abertay community and the focus on social mobility in our Strategic Plan. We are committed to offering transformational opportunities to those who could benefit from Abertay's approach to education by providing a range of routes to an Abertay degree and by supporting students and graduates to reach their full potential. We achieve this through the following key mechanisms:

- Our contextual admission policy, assessing applicants as individuals and placing an applicant's achievements in the context of their circumstances.
- Coming from College. Our extensive articulation pathways associate with wide range of HNC/D programmes, recognising that many students from disadvantaged backgrounds choose college as the first step on their higher education journey.
- The Abertay College Transition (ACT) programme supports college students coming to Abertay to understand the different learning styles involved in University study. In addition, staff highlight the skills college students have already acquired that will assist them in their studies.
- AHEAD, our dedicated, part time Access course for adult returners to higher education, supporting those who have been out of education for three years or more and who have insufficient qualifications for university entry.

Engaging with the National Schools Programmes

We actively engage with the regional National Schools Programmes. Abertay is host to LIFT OFF, the regional National Schools Programme for Tayside, Perth and Fife and provides a range of supporting activities and visits as part of their provision including S4 Campus Days and Summer School. We also regularly host visits from ASPIRE North, as well as supporting applications from LEAPS. Our dedicated College and Widening Access Recruitment Officer works closely with colleagues from the National Schools Programmes to support the applicant transition to higher education.

Deprivation and educational disadvantage

In 2023-24, provisional data shows that 19% of our Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants (SDUE) come from the 20% most deprived postcode areas. This represents an increase from 16% in 2022-23 and a return to our 2021-22 level, placing Abertay well ahead of the target set out in the Commission on Widening Access of 10% by 2021 and on a trajectory to achieve the 2030 target of 20%. Our contextual admissions policy, introduced in 2014-15, is well embedded and allows us to capture a wider range of disadvantage than relying solely on the postcode of applicants. The wider availability of robust UCAS data for 2023-24 entry at the individual applicant level, such as eligibility for Free School Meals, will allow us in future to expand the factors we take into consideration as part of our Contextual Admission Policy.

Students who meet the criteria¹ are eligible for a contextual offer at our minimum access threshold levels (three SQA Highers). We actively promote this policy and the associated access thresholds

¹ The criteria we take into consideration include participating in a recognised higher education widening access programme; spending time in care; or a combination of other criteria including: attending a low progression school, living in an SIMD40 area, having parents or guardians who have not participated in HE, or having experienced serious disruption to formal education.

through local educational networks and via our prospectus and website. All our course information on our website encourages applicants who expect to pass three Highers to apply, and our website and prospectus lists the minimum grade requirements for each course.

In 2023-24, 29% of our entrants met the criteria to be eligible for a contextual offer, with 41% of this group coming from SIMD20 postcodes. In 2023-24 we have 12 SDUE with care experience (this was 24 or 2.4% of intake in 2022-23).

Taken together, contextual entrants and SIMD20 entrants accounted for 36% of our Scottish-domiciled undergraduate intake in 2023-24 and 27% in 2022-23.

National measure C1: CoWA measure: proportion of full-time first degree SDUEs from SIMD20 postcodes.

2019-20 baseline	2020-21 actual	2021-22 actual	2022-23 actual	2023-24 provisional
16.3%	16.8%	18.7%	15.6%	19.3%

Articulation and pathways

In 2023-24, 28% of our SDUE joined Abertay in year 2, 3 or 4 of their degree programme (29% in 2022-23). This reflects our commitment to articulation and to offering a range of routes to an Abertay degree. It also reflects the model of progression we operate with our partner colleges (Dundee and Angus College, Fife College and Al-Maktoum College), with the expectation that there are clear articulation routes and automatic progression with no additional grade requirements to Abertay degrees for students passing their HNDs at partner colleges. Working in partnership with Dundee and Angus College, we have also mapped progression routes for Foundation Apprenticeships.

Our dedicated College and Widening Access Recruitment Officer works closely with colleges across Scotland to support the learner journey transition from college to university study. We also work with colleges across Scotland to offer a wide range of articulation routes across our degree programmes and to support transition through the learner journey. The full range of articulation routes is publicised on our [website](#).

Our provisional data shows that 16% (155) of SDUE articulated with full credit in 2023-24. In relation to the National Measure, the proportion of HN entrants articulating with advanced standing is 49% in 2023-24.

National measure B: Proportion of Scottish-domiciled HN entrants from Scottish colleges to undergraduate programmes with Advanced Standing.

2019-20 baseline	2020-21 actual	2021-22 actual	2022-23 actual	2023-24 provisional
66.4%	61.8%	67.7%	58.1%	48.6%

Abertay's long-running AHEAD² programme is a part time access course which provides students, on successful completion, with a guaranteed place on a range of Abertay undergraduate degree programmes. No academic qualifications are required, and it is free for eligible applicants who have been out of education for three years or more.

² <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/course-search/preparation-courses/ahead/>

Our 2020-25 strategic plan reaffirms our commitment to offering a range of routes to an Abertay degree, and to continuing to work with our college partners to ensure a smooth and successful transition to Abertay.

Priority area 2: Quality learning and teaching

High quality, learning, teaching, and support

Abertay University is deeply embedded in our regional economy. The ‘localness’ of our student demographic and our long history of delivering learning and research which is applied by business and industry locally, as well as nationally and internationally, means that we are in regular contact with our local Chamber of Commerce and the four local authorities which make up the Tay Cities Region (Dundee City, Angus, Fife, and Perth and Kinross).

In our Learning Enhancement Strategy agreed pre-pandemic, we had already set our intention to move towards a more blended learning model. Our experience throughout the pandemic has enabled us to accelerate and embed our approaches to digital education. This has seen the University adopt and formally approve a set of Principles for Blended Learning and Teaching which are now fully embedded within our provision. Student feedback from the 2022 Jisc Insights survey strongly suggests that students value the quality of that approach and particularly the digital offer (83% of students were highly satisfied with the quality of online elements of learning – 6 percentage points above sector average).

Supporting students in their transition to Abertay

For the start of academic year 2021-22 we introduced a suite of credit-bearing microcredentials (MySuccess at Abertay modules) for all first-year programmes which are intended to support transition to the University and to identify areas for academic and personal development. They aim to enable students to develop the academic and social foundations for building a successful Abertay career. This was seen as of increasing importance given the fact that students arrived from a pandemic influenced school and college scenario with hugely disrupted journeys. One of the new microcredentials (ABE101) is mandatory and focuses on setting student expectations for success. It includes a formative diagnostic test that identifies student strengths and weakness across a range of areas: academic skills, numeracy, digital skills, and wellbeing. Students are then guided to other microcredentials to support their individual needs. Abertay is also leading a [QAA Collaborative Cluster project](#) looking at this issue with ten University partners. In September 2022 the microcredential and diagnostic approach was expanded to support direct entry students in year 2 (ABE201) who would have otherwise missed the opportunity to engage with the learning that helped build those successful foundations.

From September 2021, Abertay appointed three Abertay graduates in the role of Student Success Officer (SSO), reporting to the School Academic Advisor in each academic school. The SSOs focus on supporting student engagement, starting before the formal start of term with engagement on the microcredentials and ensuring students are supported in their first weeks at Abertay. The SSOs triangulate data sources and provide a proactive role to engage with students who are showing a lack of participation. They continue to provide student support throughout the academic year and work closely with Academic Advisors to support students in danger of failing or leaving their programmes. The SSO activity has been reported at QAA annual conferences and has attracted sectoral interest. Funding for the roles was attracted from a charitable foundation and continuation beyond 2024 will depend on outcomes.

The impact of these initiatives is already apparent, and they will continue to be evaluated, developed, and enhanced over the coming year.

Retention

Improving retention remains a priority for Abertay and we recognise that the outcomes for students remain lower than we would expect. Provisional data for retention of 2022-23 entrants into 2023-24 shows a slight increase with 79% of SDUE returning compared to 76% the previous year. Both of these years represent a substantial drop from the previous 7-year trend of retention in the high 80%*s* and this is likely to be due to post-pandemic effects and the cost-of-living crisis. Retention of SIMD20 and 40 entrants is only a few percentage points lower than overall SDUE retention at 77%, however retention of mature entrants aged over 21 years, most of whom are articulating students, was 83%.

Understanding the retention challenges and how we can address these has been a priority for us. This had led to a focus on improving student engagement, particularly to support those who may struggle in their first weeks at Abertay, and on working with partner colleges to ensure that we improve the transition for articulating students and keep the curriculum under review to facilitate this. The Student Success Officers referred to above will contribute to this, but there is a wider focus on developing a sense of belonging amongst students (and new students in particular), on continuing to improve the way in which we welcome students to the University, and on ensuring that our approach to learning and teaching encourages engagement and supports students who may have a variety of personal circumstances.

In June 2023, Abertay hosted the European First Year Experience (EFYE) conference as part of a strategic plan to expose academics, professional service colleagues and students to international approaches to improving retention and student experience. 333 delegates from 24 countries attended the 3-day event and over 20 colleagues from Abertay presented. This is the first of a series of international conferences that Abertay plans to host that will help develop our practice in this area.

Partnership, participation, and student experience

Abertay Students' Association ('the Association') and University have signed a long-term Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) that is focused on the need for an effective system of student representation across all programmes and ensuring that special interests are supported through community representation. This year will see the partners continue to work together to pilot the use of student voice technologies through a student voice platform called Unitu.

Regular meetings are now held between the Association and Executive members and an annual funding agreement has been developed so that both parties are clear around expectations. The Association also regularly meets with the Dean of Teaching and Learning to navigate around obstacles and ensure that it can maximise outcomes. This is part of a key development around 'Students as Partners' that seeks to support activities that embed the student/staff relationship and make conversations between students and staff a normal facet of quality improvement. This includes an ambition to encourage students not to be passive consumers of their learning but to engage in more proactive collaborative approaches to the design and co-creation of learning materials, creating spaces for staff and students to work together on shared goals and projects to help shape the learning experience. Five projects are already in place on learning communities, and we hope for up to four more over the coming months focused on sustainability.

As part of the new first year microcredential initiative described earlier, the Association delivers a microcredential named 'Your Student Life, the purpose of which is 'to showcase to students what Abertay has to offer and inform students how they can get involved' with a learning outcome that will enable students to 'clearly identify the different ways to make the most of the Abertay community and Student Experience'.

The Association, working with the Dean of Teaching and the AbLE Academy continue to focus on continued welcome for our students. This involves activities and events on campus which foster values that both organisations feel are important elements of partnership working. These aim to create a sense of belonging with the aim of improving the student experience and increasing retention.

Learning with impact

Abertay's support for students to successfully complete their courses is covered above under the headings *High quality, learning, teaching, and support* and *Retention*. Information on the support we provide to students to progress to positive next destinations and to prepare graduates for the challenging labour market is covered in section 4 under the heading *Confident and highly capable work-ready graduates*.

Priority area 3: Coherent learning provision

Our Portfolio and ensuring it keeps pace with employer and student demand.

It is important that we track student demand for our courses, and we do this in the following ways:

Our annual planning cycle includes consultation with the Deans of Schools, Strategic Planning and External and Corporate Relations, where we assess the demand for all courses based on historic data, conduct extensive desk research using employment and subject attainment data trends, and discuss new programmes to be brought on stream.

We hold regular meetings with our college partners to ensure that our courses map across the academic progression pathways to support true articulation, considering portfolio changes that may have happened during the year at both the partner and at Abertay. In 2023-24 we estimate that 49% of HN entrants have articulated to Abertay with advanced standing.

We conduct regular market assessments of our portfolio to ensure we are meeting the changing needs of our students and employers, including desk research and consultation with partners, employers, and academic colleagues. As a university which prides itself in preparing 'work-ready graduates' and supports technology-enhanced learning, we regularly innovate our portfolio to meet changes in employment patterns. In the last 24 months we have brought on board new undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes across the subjects of Artificial Intelligence, the Environment, Fintech, Digital Marketing, Management, Criminology, Psychology, and Food Science³.

Abertay Online: Providing flexible degree learning options for in-work learners.

Our 'Abertay Online' suite of degree programmes are delivered fully on-line to support in-work learners and those who need to upskill for employment progression. For those who are unable to complete a full-time degree through our normal on-campus provision this provides the flexibility of learning on a per module basis and at a time that suits them. We are currently delivering 11 courses to meet employer demand⁴ and starting in March 2024 we will introduce a further suite of 4 Abertay Online MSc courses relating to Engineering.

³ <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/courses/>

⁴ <https://online.abertay.ac.uk/>

Upskilling courses: Supporting employability and life-long learning.

We continue to run a successful portfolio of upskilling courses with 939 learners in the period January to July 2023 funded by SFC to take part in short courses supporting sectors which have seen a fast pace of change and offer employment prospects⁵. Furthermore, Abertay was able to use the infrastructure developed through the SFC Upskilling Fund to leverage additional public funding under the National Cyber Security Centre through the Academic Centres of Excellence in Cyber Security Education to provide fully funded Cyber Security short courses for a further 130 learners.

Every course met its target number of students, and we now have a waiting list of students who have registered interest in taking part in our next set of courses. We welcome the increased funding in 2023-24 which will allow us to expand our offer and meet some of this demand.

Abertay cyberQuarter - supporting cyber security resilience and economic growth.

Abertay cyberQuarter opened in June 2022 and has already welcomed 15 partners - a mix of global industry players, start-ups, national tech and entrepreneurship hubs, trade organisations and public sector bodies. A series of high-profile events and collaborative innovation, education and research activities have taken place since the launch, including the national Cyber 9/12 Strategy Challenge⁶ from the Atlantic Council, outreach sessions led by the FBI and Police Scotland, regular Women In Cyber speaker events, a careers fair for Scottish cybersecurity students/graduates and many others. The cyberQuarter has also generated new jobs, with the NHS Scotland Cyber Centre of Excellence creating 30 roles and 25 Abertay Ethical Hacking students working part-time on real-world projects with Cyber and Fraud Centre – Scotland, alongside their studies.

Priority area 4: Work-based learning and skills

Confident and highly capable work-ready graduates

One of the core themes of our strategic plan is ‘to prepare students for the world of work and a life of learning’ and our Learning Enhancement Strategy and our Employability Strategy set out the guiding principles, goals, and indicators which we use to support us in achieving this. Our Learning Enhancement Strategy commits us to ensure that all programmes have work-related learning opportunities built into the curriculum at appropriate stages such that students not only learn new knowledge but are able to apply their learning in practical situations. Our programme teams work closely with partners in the public and private sectors to ensure that appropriate opportunities are available to students and all relevant programmes are expected to have professional body accreditation.

In summer 2022, we commenced, through the Abertay Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy, a review of our employability provision across the University. A great deal of good practice has been identified and we aim to provide a coherent package of activities for students through programme and extra-curricular sources to improve student graduate outcomes. This is not something that can be fixed overnight, but we are very encouraged that students recognise the need for career-focused learning. This has become evident through the fact that over 60% of our first-year students continue to select the employability microcredential (ABE107: Planning your Future Career).

⁵ <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/courses/upskilling-short-courses/>

⁶ <https://www.ukcyber912.co.uk/>

The University is delighted that the results of the 2020-21 Graduate Outcomes survey saw an increase of 7 percentage points in our proportion of Scottish domiciled, full-time, first-degree undergraduates in graduate level or 'high-skilled' jobs, at 68%. However, we will continue to strive to improve these outcomes and a series of activities and workshops with staff to review careers education and employability within the curriculum will continue in the coming year. Recent Institution Led Reviews have revealed the strength of the relationships with employers through entities such as Industry Liaison Groups within our Cyber Security division.

Careers Service and Graduate Success

A bespoke programme of employability support delivered by our Careers Service, and branded as 'Graduate Success', is available to all our graduates. A recent series of summer 2023 'Bootcamp' workshops were delivered to over 150 attendees on a variety of topics, the most popular workshop being 'What can I do with my degree?' whilst the most popular event was the Graduate Careers Fair. Graduates continue to access employability support via our Graduate Success programme, including access to bespoke online employability tools e.g., interview preparation and assessment centre practice, as well as continued access to personalised support from a dedicated Career Adviser. Our 'Graduate Success' programme will continue to sustain and build upon the future outcomes of our graduate-level employment rate.

All our final year students are invited to participate in our employability programme 'Graduate Award PLUS' (GAP) which runs throughout the academic year. This programme is delivered by our Careers Service and supported 153 students in the academic year 2022-23 with their preparation towards graduation. A range of support is offered in the form of one-to-one appointments, workshops, talks, online modules, and employability tools.

Our Career Mentoring Scheme aims to support and inspire our third and fourth-year students to develop their employability, whilst providing an insight into the working world before graduation - 48 students were matched with a mentor in industry during the academic year 2022-23. Third-year students also have the option of completing our 'Principal's Award', a skills-based employability programme that supports students in becoming more self-aware and confident in articulating their skills to future employers.

The Careers Service continues to promote and support a variety of employability opportunities throughout the academic year, including work placements and internships e.g., 15 students recently benefited from a Santander work placement in summer 2023, whilst over 600 students participated in a work placement module as part of their studies during the academic year 2022-23.

Reskilling and upskilling

See section 3 Coherent Learning Provision: *Upskilling courses: Supporting employability and life-long learning.*

Priority area 5: Net zero and environmental sustainability response

Over the last year we developed our new Sustainable Development Strategy⁷ incorporating extensive consultation with staff, students, and the Abertay Students' Association. The strategy was approved by University Court in June 2023.

⁷ <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/about/the-university/strategic-plan/sustainable-development-strategy/>

The Strategy is based on the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) and builds a framework around key areas of:

- Teaching, learning and students.
- Research and knowledge exchange.
- Responsible on and off campus operations.
- Our community engagement activities.

Following approval of the strategy, we will move to implementation planning during this academic year. These activities and action plans are currently being developed by the University's Sustainable Development Steering Group as part of the delivery stage of this strategy and will be regularly reported to that forum.

The University is committed to the Scottish Government's guidance on carbon reporting and reduction as given in the Public Sector Leadership on the Global Climate Emergency (October 2021). These requirements and guidance laid out in the Just Transition draft will be embedded in our action plans as we address the delivery of the SDGs.

In terms of Public Sector Leadership on the Global Climate Emergency (October 2021) we are able to respond to objectives noted in the Executive Summary of this document which are:

- Contribute to delivery of Scotland's national net zero target (mitigation – reducing greenhouse gas emissions).
- Help deliver Scotland's climate change adaptation programme (adaptation – resilience to the impacts of a changing climate).
- Act sustainably (sustainable development as a core value).

Net zero

Our Sustainable Development Strategy commits us to achieving net-zero by 2038 and our actions to achieve this will be focussed on three key areas:

1. Energy Infrastructure – our campus wide proposals to replace ageing infrastructure with a new heat network.
2. Scope 3 emissions – currently under detailed review by the university and will be included in our Public Bodies Climate Change Duties (PBCCD) report this year.
3. Fabric first – we have just recently completed the recladding of part of the University which underpins our commitment to demand management with respect to heat load. Other associated works are programmed and will be reported through PBCCD. This will also be captured in our Carbon Management Plan to be developed as part of a commitment within our Sustainable Development Strategy.

Climate change adaptation

We are working closely with EAUC and other institutions to review our Adaptation plans. Our intention is to carry out a Climate Risk Assessment and form an action plan from this. Our estates masterplan redevelopment already includes measures such as Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems however these need to be consolidated into a single plan as part of our strategic commitment.

Acting sustainably

“Acting sustainably” is now becoming an embedded behaviour in Abertay. The Sustainable Development Steering Group has representation across the University community in order to maximise our influence in bringing SDGs to reality.

We are committed to an exemplary level of reporting. EAUC's Sustainable Leadership Scorecard and Cost of Net Zero Calculator are being implemented for the first time at Abertay and results will be brought forward in the PBCCD for this year.

Our data on emissions across all 3 scopes is being collated now for inclusion in the PBCCD. We are also taking advice from EAUC on how best to present these figures and this will feed into our Projects action plan and Adaptation sections of the report.

Our Procurement team have undertaken intensive and detailed reviews of scope 3 emissions through our supply chain procurement. Outcomes will be brought forward in this year's report.

Priority area 6: High-quality research and innovation

Effective use of SFC core research grants in AY 2023-24

How do REG allocations support the research capacity and strategy of your institution?

Abertay is a compact and focused university with an established reputation for working well across traditional research boundaries, as well as within new and emerging disciplines and sectors. Our strategic plan confirms our ongoing commitment to high quality research and innovation that addresses real-world challenges and delivers real impact for society and the economy, aligned with national and local priorities⁸. We will continue to support development of excellent and impactful Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation (RKEI) through delivery of our R-LINCS2 (2020-25) strategy⁹ which integrates all RKEI activity at individual, School, and University levels. RKEI is focused within and across challenge spaces addressing key local, national, and international priorities that our research base best positions us to respond to. Challenges are addressed by drawing on our Pooled Excellence research expertise, which represent cross-institutional ways of working.

Our submission to REF2021 received extremely positive results for Abertay, signifying an overall picture of strength and improvement. We recorded a 23% increase in research that is judged as '*internationally excellent*' or '*world-leading*' since REF2014 – the biggest climb of any Scottish university, according to our analysis. We took an inclusive approach to REF2021, submitting more staff (80% of our eligible academic staff) to more subject areas (8 UoAs) than for REF2014. We made progress in expanding opportunities for academic staff to engage in research, with a notable increase in the proportion of female staff submitted since REF2014 (39% of the total, up from 28%). We achieved an overall score of 2.66, which rates our research, impact, and environment as '*quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour*'. We showed particularly strong performances and had the highest GPAs for any Scottish Modern University submitted in Art & Design (UoA 32) which covers our work in digital games; Engineering (UoA 12) which includes our work in cybersecurity, computing, forensics, and environmental engineering; Food Science (UoA 6); and Psychology (UoA 4), which respectively had 83%, 73%, 65% and 60% of research rated as '*internationally excellent*' or '*world-leading*'.

Our REG allocation helps support RKEI excellence through pan-University leadership, support, and initiatives, to drive discipline strengths and interdisciplinary research within a resilient and sustainable research environment. REG is allocated directly to Schools based on Division contributions to UoA 3*/4* REF2021 performance and in line with the SFC REG formula. Schools reward and support excellent RKEI, by investing in 3* / 4* staff time, talented Early Career Researchers and new to Abertay staff, RKEI related Sabbaticals, PhD studentships, RKEI facilities and technical support, bid support including contribution towards full economic costs, and research conference attendance and presentation.

⁸ An overview of research at Abertay is available at <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/research-overview/>

⁹https://www.abertay.ac.uk/media/k1jified/research-and-knowledge-exchange-strategy-2020-25_v2.pdf

How do Research Postgraduate Grant (RPG) allocations support the postgraduate research capacity and strategy of your institution?

Postgraduate Research Students (PGRS) are central to our research community, working alongside experts to pose new questions and find creative solutions to problems facing society. All PGRS, researchers and research-enabling staff have access to our dedicated support, study, and social spaces within our pan-University Graduate School, as well as a comprehensive and integrated training and development programme. Our shared Graduate School space at the heart of the University is designed to promote a sense of community, support, integration, and cross-discipline exchange amongst the research community, so that ideas and expertise might permeate across discipline boundaries to spark innovative discoveries, creativity, new thinking, and collaboration. Abertay is committed to developing PGRS to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse and global research environment. We continue to monitor the student experience and impact of Covid on PGRS through an annual survey.

RPG funds are allocated to the Graduate School (supporting staffing, technology, licences, etc), which is responsible for development and delivery of a high-quality integrated researcher training and professional development programme, individual support, Research Degrees quality assurance and enhancement, and advances the contribution of PGRS to the research base and highly skilled workforce in Scotland and beyond. RPG funding is also used to support our membership of the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science, Scottish Graduate School for Arts & Humanities, Scottish Informatics and Computer Science Alliance, Scottish Institute for Policing Research, and Scottish Alliance for Geoscience, Environment and Society.

Supporting sustainability and future research excellence

What are you prioritising/what are you doing to ensure your institution remains a viable research organisation into the future?

For 2023-24 our priorities include:

- Ensuring RKEI excellence through effective leadership and management of researchers, robust and fair workload planning, and a focus on researcher/professional development training, support, and mentoring.
- Developing our integrated and efficient RKEI funding and award support service, including staffing and systems developments.
- Continuing to build our standing by focussing on our strengths, cross disciplinary research, and industry collaboration.

Some specific actions for 2023-24 are:

- Fully engaging with REF2028 development through sector-wide discussion fora, working groups and consultations.
- Strategic planning and preparing for changes and developments to some of our systems at the earliest opportunity e.g., through workload planning and management of researchers.
- Development of our Trusted Research Policy, support, and processes.

Enabling an excellent research environment and positive cultures

How is your institution creating an excellent research environment and positive research cultures?

Abertay's Institutional Research Environment (REF2021) was judged as vital and sustainable across all assessed aspects. The supporting environment was judged to be comprehensive and well organised, with a full complement of policies in place. Our provisions to support researchers were judged to be consistent with those that might be expected in a larger, more research-intensive institution and were consequently highly commended. Other positive aspects highlighted included good investment in PGRS, the Graduate School and the upward trend in research income, especially from UKRI. The panel judged our RKEI strategy to be coherent and convincing. Looking forward, we are currently involved with a University Scotland task and finish group focussed on Research Culture.

Our aims for 2023-24 are to build on these strengths. Actions going forward include:

- Implementation of actions arising from the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) (see Appendix 1 for more information)
- A new policy for the Knowledge Exchange Concordat has recently been approved.
- Progressing development of our Open Research Data policy with more efficient systems to support the new policy for Engaging the Public with Research that is under development.
- Progressing development of our Open Access Publications policy, specifically the issue of right retention and promoting the use of open-access data repositories.
- An Abertay local network lead has recently joined the UK Reproducibility Network.
- We have joined and are fully engaging with the US Research Culture Task and Finish Group.

Abertay University is committed to good research conduct and to the underlying principles and commitments of the revised UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity (CSRI). Our Annual Statement on Research Integrity is published at <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/research-overview/research-governance/> ([Annual statement on research integrity](#)). We are compliant with our CSRI commitments; all staff, students and visiting researchers must adhere to the highest standards of integrity in the conduct of their research as specified in the *Abertay Research Code of Conduct* (ARCoC) and engage in mandatory research integrity training. The Dean of Research & Graduate School and the University Research Ethics Committee are responsible for the development and delivery of the CSRI Action Plan. Clear reporting lines are signposted on-line for anyone wishing to discuss or raise concern about research misconduct.

Concordats

Abertay is a signatory and is fully committed to the principles outlined in the UK [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#) (see Appendix 1). Our updated action plan is published at <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/research-overview/research-governance/> ([Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan for Publication](#)).

We have engaged with the 2023 [Culture, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers Survey](#) and will incorporate appropriate actions into our action plans during 2023-24.

Abertay is fully engaged with the principles of the [Concordat on Open Research Data](#).

The [Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research](#), has recently launched its Civic Engagement Strategy <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/about/the-university/strategic-plan/civic-engagement-strategy/>, and is a signatory of the [Knowledge Exchange Concordat](#).

We use concordat principles to guide development of our research environment and culture. For example, in progressing development of our open research environment we are ensuring published outputs are open-access and research data compliant. Our Open Access and Research Data Management Policies, researcher development training and individual support, are used to promote staff engagement in open science/research practices, pre-registration, and the use of open-access data repositories.

An Abertay local network lead has recently joined the [UK Reproducibility Network](#), which aims to build a UK network of researchers and institutions who will work towards a more collaborative, open, and transparent research culture.

Governance and progress with concordat action plans and developments are reported and monitored through the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee which reports to Senate and Court.

Priority area 7: University Innovation Fund (UIF)

Abertay is well placed to contribute to delivery of key strategic drivers identified in [the Scottish Government's Innovation Strategy](#) and [The Entrepreneurial Campus: Higher Education As A Driving Force For The Entrepreneurial Ecosystem](#).

Our 2023-24 plan represents continued proactive engagement with the University Innovation Fund (UIF) agenda. We have built upon our strengths and given the funding framework, have focused our engagement with some, rather than all of the outcomes. Abertay match funds the UIF Platform Grant and will receive a UIF contribution of £400K in 2023-24, which we use to maintain and develop our essential core Knowledge Exchange and Innovation (KE&I) support services and activities (through staff salaries, infrastructure, and Pump Priming support). For example, UIF supported infrastructure has been essential in helping to secure our Tay Cities Deal for the cyberQuarter¹⁰. We work collaboratively across the sector, sharing our experiences and learning from other institutions.

We will continue to support the Sustainable Development Goals and National Outcomes identified in relation to the Outcome Grant. A key element in our strategy going forward is support for the net zero economy, which aligns strongly with several of our areas of research expertise. As stated in our [Abertay Sustainable Development Strategy](#) *"We are committed to high quality research and innovation that addresses real-world challenges and delivers impact for society, the environment, and the economy. We promote collaborative and interdisciplinary research and innovation through our Pooled Excellence cross-institutional ways of working, to address key local, national and international priorities, focussed within and across our Challenge Spaces (Sustainable Development & Inclusive Living; Security, Equality & Social Justice; Health & Care Across the Lifespan; Creative Industries & Cultural Vitality)."*

Abertay has signed up to the eight guiding principles contained in the UK-wide [Knowledge Exchange Concordat](#) (KEC) which provides a framework for effective knowledge exchange and supports institutions to develop clear and ambitious strategic objectives for their Knowledge Exchange (KE) activities. Our Knowledge Exchange Concordat Policy aligns with the KEC principles and was launched in 2022-23.

Reflecting on 2022-23, we have strengthened our contributions to outcomes 1 and 4 in particular. In discussion with Scottish Funding Council, we have agreed to work at a sector level to deliver the National Outcomes by working with the Universities Scotland (US) Research and Commercialisation Directors' Group (RCDG) to contribute to outcomes 1 and 4, whilst continuing to engage with the learning and outputs of the other three groups; and taken an increased leadership within RCDG, as we now Chair their Contracts Sub-Group and also provided one of the speakers to their sectoral workshop on IP commercialisation.

¹⁰ <https://www.taycities.co.uk/news/abertay-cyberquarter-creates-new-home-cybersecurity-research-innovation-and-industry-growth>

For outcome 1 our key approach is through large-scale external funding at the interface between industry, public sector, and academia in a small number of distinctive and strategically important areas. We are part-way through delivery of our cyberQuarter which has targets of 150 businesses assisted, 500 new/ safeguarded jobs and £2.86M of additional business turnover. During 2022-23 AHRC invited a consortium which included Abertay to run the UK Government's Convergent Screen Technologies and performance in Realtime (CoSTAR) National Lab, with Abertay also being the lead for one of three Network Labs. Our National Lab deliverables include ~85 new products/ processes/ services, 23-27 new investments and ~20 new companies. Our role in the network lab is to provide pathways and so opportunities for the creative sector to engage with virtual production and virtual performance using games technologies and AI.

For outcome 4, we have strengthened our engagement with external partners, including through the embedding of Techscaler within cyberQuarter and the CoSTAR's Network Lab and hosting an ICURE event which will be open to all Scottish universities. Our support to both staff and student entrepreneurship is also supported by the activities set out in our Knowledge Exchange Action Plan (see Outcome 2). With the roll out of CoSTAR's over the next twelve months we believe we will further strengthen our contribution to outcomes 1 and 4 in particular.

OUTCOME 1. Demand Stimulation

Increase the demand and quality of engagement from businesses and the public sector for university services.

We will continue to focus on:

- Working with key stakeholders in the business/public sector/third sector communities through events, speaker opportunities and company engagement in key sectors.
- Supporting academic colleagues with new course development through identification of sector trends/skills gaps/synergies with industry bodies.
- Supporting financial and business development bids.
- Driving enterprise initiatives to support student employability.

Our drivers are:

- Abertay becoming the first port of call for private, public and third sector partners in key industry areas including sectors identified in the UK Industrial Strategy, the Scottish Government's Innovation Strategy, and the Tay Cities Regional Economic Strategy 2019-2039.
- Our students and graduates being known to possess the right mix of skills, confidence, and attributes for their employers, now and in the future.

ScotHERD (the practitioners' arm of US Researcher Development & Culture Committee) held a session (June 2023) on KE&I, facilitated by the KE&I Collaboration Manager and Skillfluence, to better understand the role that Researcher Developers play in feeding the KE&I pipeline in our institutions. We will build on this to explore more opportunities for collaboration, aiming to increase the capacity for industry engagement in our institution and increase the quality of those engagements.

Abertay now host Techscaler within the cyberQuarter. We will continue to develop our relationship with Techscaler and Codebase to promote tech company R&D. Techscaler are already a delivery model partner within our two successful AHRC CoSTAR bids.

We will actively engage with Interface as they evolve their delivery model towards supporting more strategic engagement between academia and industry. This has potential to increase the demand and quality of engagement from businesses and the public sector for university services. For example, Interface were our delivery model partner for the AHRC In-GAME project and are a formal partner in our new CoSTAR Network Lab. We will explore more strategic initiatives when opportunities arise. More generally, we will encourage academic engagement with the funding opportunities made available by Interface, including Innovation Vouchers (Student Placement, Standard and Advanced), Inward Investment Catalyst Fund, and Healthier Products Innovation Fund for Scotland.

The School of Applied Sciences provides consultancy to companies on diverse projects including advising on palatability, taste and texture of food and beverages. Recently, we received Innovate funding to explore seaweed's potential in food and drinks and we also provide expertise in Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) related to climate change. Research-driven work with Arbigie Highland Estate led to the world's first 'climate positive' gin and vodka products and our Transform Net Zero project reduces carbon emissions in the Scottish food and drink industry, developing new products from waste materials.

The indication is that the next generation Innovation Centres (as 'infrastructure investments') will be strategically closer to HEIs, and this has the potential to increase the demand and quality of engagement from businesses and the public sector for university services. In an institutional capacity and through UIF collaborative groups, we will actively engage with Innovation Centres to influence more coherent relationships over the course of the next academic year.

We are committed to working with the sector to support further development and implementation of SFC's review plans, particularly in relation to the development of a KEIF reporting framework, and the delivery of KEIF priorities and the Entrepreneurial Campus Blueprint over the longer term.

OUTCOME 2. Simplification/ Commercialisation

Simplify business access to the knowledge and expertise in Scottish universities.

Our consultancy framework encourages our staff to use their knowledge and expertise to solve real-world problems and to make a positive impact on the world around us. This will support entrepreneurial activity by our staff and build on our strong track record in this area. Our dedicated [Business](#), and [Facilities and Services](#) webpages aim to support businesses to better understand the innovation opportunities which can be realised in collaboration with Abertay. We have clear information about our services and facilities, single points of contact and examples/case studies in different categories to illustrate what is possible. The One Stop Shop approach has allowed commercial businesses to engage efficiently and quickly with the University.

The IP Commercialisation Peer Network meets twice per year. In 2023-24, we will build on previous network meetings, focusing on:

- Sharing resources, and collaborative solutions to increase academic engagement.
- Sector-specific approaches to commercialisation, including in creative industries and the social sciences.
- Collaborative approaches to partnering events and other international opportunities.
- Collaborative response to national strategies, including Scottish Government's Innovation Strategy and National Strategy for Economic Transformation.

Abertay are leading the Contracts Sub-Group of this RCDG network and in 2023-24 will focus on the Trusted Research agenda and implications of the new UK Subsidy Control regime.

Scotland's National Innovation Strategy (June 2023) states: '*We will design a new Research Commercialisation Framework for Scotland... we will work closely with RCDG to develop our detailed proposals for research commercialisation*'. We welcome this opportunity to inform the detail and implementation of this strategy and will work closely with our colleagues in collaboration via RCDG.

Our work on commercialisation has also been supported by our Knowledge Exchange Action Plan which identifies supporting actions and key paths to working with businesses and other end users of our research.

OUTCOME 3. Simplification/Greater Innovation

Make strategic use of their sectoral knowledge to promote greater innovation in the economy.

Through the UIF Collaboration Manager, we continue to engage with the regional lead for Innovate UK in Scotland, to influence policy and increase opportunity for Scottish businesses to innovate.

During September 2023, we will engage with a Challenge Fund Network collaborative workshop on the role Innovation Centres can play in securing Collaborative R&D funding (UKRI or other) for:

- capacity building between researchers and industry,
- influencing funders on next big opportunities,
- developing competitive collaborative bids.

OUTCOME 4. Entrepreneurialism

Make a significant and positive change in the way entrepreneurial opportunities are promoted and delivered to students, HEI staff, and businesses.

One of the most important contributions that universities can make to Scottish businesses is to refresh the pool of talent by developing business-literate and enterprising graduates and postgraduates with a strong educational grounding. We are proud of our industry focus and links to business. Many of our students become self-employed, freelance, contractors, or take a portfolio approach to work and career.

As a city, and as part of the Tay Cities region, Dundee faces major challenges in terms of employment, business start-up, and economic growth. With some 75% of our students coming from the local area and many choosing to stay here after graduation, Abertay can play a major role in developing the right skills to support employability and the creation of high value jobs locally, nationally, and globally.

Our enterprise activities span:

- Entrepreneurial mindsets, skills, and behaviours.
- Commercial awareness.
- Company creation and business start-up.
- Self-employment options and new ways of working.

These activities are supported by our Knowledge Exchange Action Plan (see outcome 2).

We will encourage the development of enterprise skills and entrepreneurial behaviour among our students through a range of activities across 4 priority themes:

Priority 1: A place for enterprise – we have:

- Established a hub for student enterprise in the heart of the Abertay campus – [Bell Street Ventures](#).
- Provided a mix of dedicated office accommodation for staff, student and graduate entrepreneurs plus hot-desking facilities, meeting space and a collaboration space for team development activities.

Priority 2: Skills and learning for enterprise – we will:

- Engage with our teaching staff to identify opportunities to introduce and embed enterprise skills and expertise to students through a range of activities.
- Curate a year-round programme of virtual and in person workshops and drop-in sessions for students.
- Deliver a microcredential that covers enterprise and the future of work.
- Host relevant and useful resources for student enterprise.
- Offer enterprise activity as viable student placement and internship opportunities.

Priority 3: Access to enterprise support – we are:

- Improving signposting for students to sources of finance and business support to help them to understand the options available to them.
- Prioritising engagement with high profile national and specialist sector programmes to facilitate the increased visibility of enterprise activity among our students and within the business community.
- Through our work in this area, we continue to support student applications and success stories for initiatives such as [Converge Challenge](#) and we will also continue to increase our involvement with [Scottish EDGE](#).
- Supporting student and graduate led start-ups through the introduction of microfinance and bursary funding using philanthropic funding.

Priority 4: “Social first” enterprise - we will support Scottish Government’s Social Enterprise Strategy by:

- Providing inspiration on campus to stimulate social entrepreneurship through teaching, knowledge transfer and business incubation.
- Delivering a microcredential that covers social enterprises.
- Supporting social enterprise through programmes such as the Scottish Government backed support programme [Social Shifters](#), delivered by CEIS.

Abertay’s UIF received a modest uplift of £33k for 2023-24. We will use this to support the entrepreneurial activity described within this section, including Techscaler/ICURE, cyberQuarter, RCDG engagement including leadership of the Contracts subgroup, and engaging with Interface, Converge and Innovation Centres.

OUTCOME 5. International

Pool knowledge and networks and share good practice to promote and engage Scotland internationally.

Through RCDG, we will influence the new Research Commercialisation Framework for Scotland, as proposed in Scottish Government’s Innovation Strategy (June 2023), which ‘*will include exploring options for developing consistent approaches to, and guidance for, handling the intellectual property that arises from both publicly funded research and inward investment, as set out in our Inward Investment Plan (2020).*’

OUTCOME 6. Inclusive Growth and Social Impact

Scale up support of the Scottish Government’s ambitions for inclusive growth.

See Outcome 4.

Our City Deal project, the cyberQuarter, specifically address the inclusive growth agenda. For example, cyberQuarter has a specific focus on upskilling people in the local area, ‘unblocking’ the pipeline for the low and middle level jobs within the digital economy by offering opportunities to gain a ‘cyber premium’ in terms of skills, salary, and employability prospects, and facilitating new entrants into the industry from disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

During 2022-23, we have also introduced a Civic Engagement Strategy which recognises the contribution that our research strategy makes towards civic engagement.

OUTCOME 7. Equality and Diversity

Ensure positive promotion of equality and diversity in staff and all who are affected by the use of the UIF.

Through each of the collaborative activities, we benefit from the diversity of our HEIs, including the diversity of individuals involved. Our strategic plan confirms our intention to mainstream equality and diversity across all our activities. Our Equality Action Plan, which contains detailed actions is routinely monitored and updated. We hold an Athena SWAN Institutional Bronze award and were the first Scottish University to be awarded a Race Equality Charter Bronze award.

Appendix 1

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

Name of Institution	Abertay University
Reporting period	2021/2022
Date approved by governing body	17 th May 2023 (by the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee via delegated authority)
Date published online	14 th November 2023
Web address of annual report	https://www.abertay.ac.uk/research-overview/research-governance/
Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	https://www.abertay.ac.uk/research-overview/research-governance/
Contact for questions/concerns on researcher career development	Prof Nia White (Dean of Research and the Graduate School) Dr Alison Elliott (Head of Researcher Development and Research Impact)
Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk	14 th November 2023

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)

The creation of a positive research culture is firmly embedded within our university and research strategies. These affirm our core purpose to develop and sustain an inclusive, healthy and supportive culture, welcoming and retaining staff and students from a range of backgrounds and inspiring them to achieve their full potential. We strive to create a sustainable, supportive and collaborative culture in which our researchers can thrive and develop as both researchers and individuals.

We are fully engaged with the principles of the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*, the *Concordat to Support Research Integrity*, the *Concordat on Open Research Data*, the *Knowledge Exchange Concordat*, and the *Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research*, and use these to guide the development of our research culture.

We promote a positive culture through the implementation of: supportive policies, processes and structures; strong leadership; quality infrastructure; excellent researcher development opportunities; and efficient systems.

We embed EDI in our strategies, policies, operations, and strategic thinking, recognising and valuing researchers with different backgrounds, attitudes, experiences, and career paths who bring fresh ideas and perspectives to our Institution. We believe in the benefits that come from having a diverse population and are committed to facilitating the widest possible applicant pool into doctoral study.

We occupy a compact campus which fosters collaboration between researchers at different career levels and across Schools. Our pan-University Graduate School is the central hub of our research activities and has transformed our research environment. The Graduate School (of which all academic staff and postgraduate students are members) provides an important dedicated space for networking, discussing research, training, sharing good practice and supporting peer well-being.

Our commitment to development ensures our researchers have access to, and the time for, the development of skills needed for employability, effectiveness, and career progression. Our Graduate School offers a comprehensive range of professional development opportunities and support including a formal training programme (80 events annually), one-to-one support (with funding applications, publications, research design, statistics, impact, business development, public engagement, and outreach) and a research seminar series. We endeavour to develop our researchers to be adaptable and flexible to ensure that they can succeed in an increasingly diverse global research environment and employment market.

Our research environment and researcher development provision has been commended over the reporting period in both our *Enhancement-led Institutional Review* and REF2021 institutional feedback.

Our research culture is supported and enhanced through our memberships of Vitae, the Scottish Graduate Schools, the Scottish Research Pools, the British Academy ECR Network, Universities Scotland, ScotHERD, and the Scottish Research Integrity Network. These groups provide our researchers with access to additional networks, training programmes and internships, and ensure sharing of good practice across the Scottish research sector.

Fostering a positive research culture and inclusive community is an ethos that threads through all that we do, and we endeavour to inspire researchers who are talented, caring, ethical and reflective professionals and who are committed to generating and mobilising knowledge across a range of scholarly, professional and public communities.

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)

We have established a Researcher Development Concordat (RDC) group to examine how the principles of the Concordat are currently embedded within our Institution, explore how policies and processes could be improved and oversee the implementation of changes. The group is led by the Dean of Research & the Graduate School and supported by the Head of Researcher Development and Research Impact. The group has representation from across the organisation including senior academic staff, early career researchers, the Graduate School, and People Services.

We have chosen to implement the principles of the Concordat for all those engaged with research at Abertay. This includes all academic staff engaged with the conduct, supervision or management of research and Postgraduate Research Students (PGRS).

For each of the Concordat pillars our strategic objectives are to:

Environment and culture

- Embed a positive research culture and promote a supportive healthy working environment for researchers at all stages of their career to help them develop to their full potential and enhance their future career opportunities.
- Ensure researchers act in accordance with the highest standards of professional conduct.
- Support and promote equality, diversity and inclusion in all our strategies, policies and practices.
- Ensure that the culture for our researchers is inclusive, transparent, accessible and equitable.
- Review and revise our training provision to ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities, expectations and opportunities particularly with respect to the Concordat, Research Integrity, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- Invest in our research environment and infrastructure.
- Review and seek feedback on our research environment and culture and use this information to improve our institutional practices.

Employment

- Ensure fair, equitable and transparent processes for appointing and re-grading academic research staff and managing workloads.
- Ensure that researchers work in accordance with Institutional policies and procedures as well as the requirements of their Funders.
- Review and revise our induction provision for academic staff and PGRS to ensure all researchers are aware of policies and practices relevant to their position.
- Ensure researchers and research managers actively engage in regular constructive management discussions and continue to reflect and revise our process for this.
- Review and revise our training opportunities for research managers to ensure that they are equipped to provide effective line management and PGRS supervision.
- Ensure that researchers and research managers have a voice within the institution and provide opportunities for them to actively contribute to strategy and policy.

Professional and Career Development

- Provide the opportunities, support and time for researchers to engage in professional development activities that will improve their employability and career progression.
- Encourage and support researchers to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills.

- Encourage researchers to develop their experience of the wider research system and support their move between different sectors where relevant.
- Encourage researchers to maintain an up-to-date professional career development portfolio of research skills and experience.
- Ensure that researchers engage with career development discussions with their line managers annually.
- Develop and maintain a system to record, monitor and report on the engagement of researchers with professional development activities.

Measures for evaluating progress and success

We will review our progress against our action plan annually. This will involve assessing developments under each of the pillars for each of the key stakeholder groups against our targets. We will consider outcomes successful where changes to our policies and practices make us compliant with the Concordat. In areas where we are already compliant, success will be determined by the implementation of strategies and processes that are more efficient, effective, or inclusive for the relevant stakeholder group.

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]

Environment and Culture (max 600 words)

Institution

All new researchers (staff and PGRS) undertake a compulsory induction programme which introduces the concepts of the *Concordat*, *Research Strategy*, *Research Integrity*, *Researcher Development*, *Research Supervision*, *University regulations*, and *Healthy Working Lives*. Both staff and PGRS inductions were revised over the reporting period to ensure important policies and practices are covered.

We have revised our development provision so that sessions on *National Concordats* and *Research Integrity* are now compulsory for new researchers. *Research Integrity* (research ethics, data management, GDPR and open access) must also now be repeated every three years so that researchers receive the latest information. We have also given PGRS access to the mandatory staff training on *Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education* to ensure they are aware of EDI issues within a university setting.

We embed EDI in all our research policies and practices to ensure that they are inclusive, equitable and transparent. We have comprehensively revised our research intranet pages over the last year to ensure that we have a dedicated compendium of all our research strategies, policies, processes, and guides and make these available to all staff and PGRS.

We continue to invest in our research environment. Over this reporting period we have undertaken substantial refurbishment of our buildings and research laboratories, upgraded equipment across our Schools, and created new social spaces suitable for research discussions. Our technicians continue to support researchers working in our research laboratories.

We have continued to promote a healthy working environment (we hold an NHS Scotland Healthy Working Lives Gold Award) and actively address any incidents of bullying, harassment and poor research integrity.

	<p>We have continued to seek feedback on our research environment and culture and have used this information to improve our institutional practices (e.g., in response to feedback at our Graduate School Forum, we made substantial improvements to our PGRS process for recording development activities).</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers Our Research Managers continue to receive training on <i>Research Integrity</i> and <i>EDI</i> and are now required to refresh this training every three years.</p> <p>To ensure that our researchers and managers act in accordance with the highest standards of integrity we had intended to introduce a regular sample audit of compliance for some processes (e.g., research data management) by 2021-22. This has been delayed due to the introduction of a new system to monitor this data.</p> <p>We have revised our Flexible Working Policy (following the Covid-19 pandemic) to ensure all our researchers are supported by their managers to work as flexibly as appropriate.</p> <p>Research Managers continue to have the opportunity to contribute to policy development aimed at improving our research culture through general fora and their positions on formal committees.</p> <p>Researchers We continue to encourage researchers to take advantage of the opportunities of our research environment and contribute to our rich, vibrant community.</p> <p>In addition to being supported by their line managers, research staff are also now mentored by senior research colleagues to learn best practice and ensure they are well supported in their research endeavours. They also have access to a cross institutional academic mentoring scheme to provide career development support. PGRS are supported by their supervisors and Graduate School staff.</p> <p>We have substantially revised our intranet pages over the reporting period to provide additional signposting to support new starts.</p> <p>Researchers continue to receive training on <i>Research Integrity</i> and <i>EDI</i> and are required to refresh this training every three years.</p> <p>Progress We were already compliant with many of the Concordat principles in this pillar. We have continued to review our policies and practices in relation to environment and culture and made several changes to improve what we do.</p>
<p>Employment (max 600 words)</p>	<p>Institution Our recruitment and promotion policies ensure fair, equitable and transparent processes for appointing and re-grading academic staff. We hold an Athena SWAN Bronze award, the Race Equality Charter Mark bronze award and are a DORA signatory. When considering appointments and promotions, we evaluate research on its own merit. All staff involved in recruitment are now required to undertake <i>Recruitment</i> training and all researchers complete mandatory</p>

Diversity in the Workplace and *Unconscious Bias* training. We strive to ensure interview panels have appropriate representation. We reflect annually on all our recruitment and promotion policies.

The majority of our academic staff have both a teaching and research remit and are on core contracts. We continue to be mindful of the challenges around employment insecurity and limit the use of zero-hours and fixed-term contracts to occasions where there is a genuine requirement for this type of flexibility. Our Recruitment Policy ensures that researchers on fixed-term contracts are not discriminated against in terms of access to career development activities and redeployment.

All new researchers (staff and PGRS) undertake a compulsory induction programme. Both programmes were revised over the reporting period to ensure that they cover all relevant policies and practices. We also amended the programme delivery to ensure volume of information was not overwhelming. All attendees now receive a copy of the programme content so that they can revisit it as required.

We continue to champion excellent people management through our comprehensive training offer, annual Development Discussions process, transparent promotion criteria and workload allocation planning. Promotion criteria are available on our intranet pages, and we hold annual training sessions to help staff prepare for an application. Individual workload allocation plans are now published internally to ensure transparency.

We have revised our training provision to ensure we provide line and project management opportunities for our Research Managers and Heads of Division. Training is provided through People Services and the Graduate School.

Academic Managers of Researchers

We continue to ensure that our Research Managers undertake relevant training and development so that they can manage research staff effectively. All Research Managers responsible for staff are required to complete training before undertaking management reviews and discussions to ensure they can best support staff.

We have developed new training for Research Managers who supervise PGRS to help them better support their students with professional development. This had been highlighted as a key weakness of supervisors in our last PGRS survey.

Researchers

All researchers are required to work in accordance with institutional policies and procedures. Training on *University Regulations and Researcher Responsibilities* is now compulsory for new researchers.

We have introduced a new Funding Support Team during the current reporting period to help researchers understand the terms and conditions of grant funding and work in accordance with them.

	<p>All research staff are expected to have bi-annual personal Development Discussion meetings to discuss objectives, development needs, and general issues with their managers. Several revisions were made to the process last year to optimise its benefit to staff. Compliance with the process is managed by People Services. Over the current reporting period there was a 98% completion rate across the Institution.</p> <p>We continue to ensure that researchers and managers have a voice within our institution and can actively contribute to institutional strategy, policy and decision-making by providing them with opportunities to contribute to formal committees, groups and open fora.</p> <p>Progress</p> <p>We were already compliant with all the Concordat principles in this pillar. However, we have continued to review our policies and practices in relation to employment to improve our approaches and maximise awareness of the relevant issues.</p>
<p>Professional development (max 600 words)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>The Graduate School provides a comprehensive researcher development programme (80 sessions annually). We review and revise our programme each year to update knowledge, introduce new advancements and respond to the needs of our researchers. Over the reporting period we introduced 15 new sessions. The programme is entirely flexible to suit individual needs. Researchers are encouraged to develop discipline specific and transferable skills suitable for academic and non-academic careers. We record training to increase accessibility and enable researchers to review it at a time most appropriate for them.</p> <p>Research staff have annual Development Discussion meetings with their managers. We have amended the process over the reporting period to include a dedicated research section. This has aided conversations about researcher development, enabled researchers to identify training priorities and facilitated planning. Time for researcher development is built into workload allocation plans based on these discussions. All research staff are made aware of their development time entitlement. All PGRS discuss development with their supervisors every 6 months and are encouraged to spend 3-4 hours per week on development activities.</p> <p>We recognise that moving between employment sectors can bring benefits. During the reporting period we have supported internships and secondments to the Scottish Government, local government, Industry and the third sector. In addition, our Sabbatical Policy supports leave for researcher development.</p> <p>PGRS keep a record of their professional development as part of their degree and this is formally monitored. Staff engagement with researcher development is overseen by line managers but is not formally monitored centrally (except for Development Discussions and some on-line training). Initial assessment of how to address this has highlighted the need for further work.</p>

	<p>We continue to identify and engage with initiatives to improve development for our researchers e.g., in 2022 we joined the Scottish Consortium of the British Academy Early Career Research Network.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers Research Managers engage in regular career development discussions with their researchers. Changes to this were implemented last year to optimise the process. Managers support their researchers to undertake relevant training to prepare for a range of careers and are aware of researcher entitlement for professional development.</p> <p>Research Managers have opportunities to engage in leadership and management training (e.g., Advance HE Leadership programme). We continue to encourage and support women to take part in the Aurora leadership programme and several of our staff are engaged as Role Models.</p> <p>Researchers Researchers are encouraged to take ownership of their career, undertake professional development training and work towards career goals. We are a member of Vitae and promote the use of the Researcher Development Framework to monitor skills development and identify skill gaps. We undertook substantial revisions of our package for recording PGRS training last year to improve functionality.</p> <p>All research staff are expected to positively engage with career development reviews and 98% of staff had a Development Discussions meeting with their manager last year.</p> <p>All researchers are encouraged to seek out opportunities to develop their research identity. We provide signposting in our Virtual Learning Environment (substantially revised last year) of relevant external bodies and groups that can further support researcher development and networking.</p> <p>We encourage and support researchers to develop their understanding and experience of the wider research system. In addition to providing internal training on knowledge exchange, research commercialisation and public engagement we routinely advertise opportunities on secondments and internships for our researchers to explore.</p> <p>Progress We provide substantial professional and career development opportunities for our researchers and are compliant with many of the Concordat principles in this pillar. Additional work is required to improve our recording and monitoring of researcher development amongst research staff.</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. (max 500 words)</p>	
<p>Although compliant with the Concordat in most areas we have continued to review our relevant policies, processes and practices to optimise them where possible. We have shown</p>	

that it is possible to make improvements to established processes and that even small changes in policy and/or practice can have a beneficial impact for our researchers and institution (e.g., revisions to our induction programmes, appraisals process, training provision and research pages). We will continue to review relevant policies and procedures regularly to understand where additional benefits can be made.

We have identified two key areas where the lack of an appropriate system or process for recording and monitoring the data has hampered our progress and these two areas still require more work.

Sample Audits of Research Compliance

To ensure that our researchers and their managers act in accordance with the highest standards of research integrity and professional conduct we had intended to introduce a regular sample audit of compliance for some of our processes (e.g., research data management and open access data) by 2021-22. Initial review of establishing these audits showed that the data to be monitored was not kept in a consistent format across the University. To overcome this problem, researchers and their managers have been issued with new guidelines on the requirements for recording and storing information relating to research projects and outputs. These revisions have been rolled out over the current reporting period and will allow us to start to undertake sample audits during the next reporting period. We therefore intend to revise our Action Plan to meet this target in 2023-2024.

Monitoring Researcher Development Engagement

The monitoring and reporting of researcher engagement with professional development remains one of our key challenges in meeting the Concordat. Individual researchers keep their own records of development training, and these are not reviewed or recorded by the institution. Attendance at internally run events has routinely been recorded by the individual university sections responsible for event delivery, but this was not recorded centrally. Over the reporting period, People Services have started to pull together a central spreadsheet of staff attendance at university events, but this does not include PGRS. In addition, attendance at external professional development events and engagement with less formal training activities (such as one-to-one support activities and outreach events) are not recorded by the institution.

Our action plan stated that we would have an efficient staff researcher development training record system in place by 2024-25. At this stage we are unclear as to when we are likely to have a training record system in place or how comprehensive this development record will be. Initial exploration of using existing systems to formally record training centrally has identified two hurdles: 1) the practicalities of setting up the system for recording the information and 2) our PGRS would need to be added or their data would need to be retained in a separate system. We will continue to explore the opportunities and limitations of different approaches over the coming reporting period.

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

In the coming reporting period, our key objectives are to:

1. Conduct the CEDARS survey

We will undertake our first Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) between April and May 2023. All academic staff and PGRS will be invited to complete the survey which will be completely anonymous. The survey will provide important feedback on issues relevant to the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers including questions around the environment, culture, professional development, employment of research staff and the experiences of their managers. We will use this information to review and, where relevant, improve our institutional practices.

2. Undertake our PGRS survey

We will conduct our bi-annual survey of our PGRS community between March and April 2023. All active PGRS will be invited to complete the survey and provide feedback. The survey will be completely anonymous and will provide important feedback on our research environment, Graduate School community, research culture and policies relevant to the PGRS experience. Data from the survey will be reviewed and directly compared with data from previous years to determine areas of improvement and deterioration. We will subsequently use this information to review and, where relevant, improve our institutional practices.

3. Complete our Institution-Led Review of postgraduate research degrees

Our next Institution-Led Review (ILR) of our postgraduate research degrees and processes will take place in May 2023 to comply with the Scottish Funding Council's quality guidance that all credit-bearing provision will be reviewed at least every six years. The ILR will facilitate strategic and operational review of our provision. It involves a process of critical self-reflection that: identifies good practice for dissemination and areas for improvement; demonstrates engagement with external benchmarks; and demonstrates appropriate processes for engaging students as partners. It will involve an independent team reviewing reports, the evidence base and meeting with staff and students.

4. Implement a sample audit of research processes

Having undertaken the groundwork to introduce regular sample audits of compliance for some of our processes, we will undertake our first set of audits in 2023-2024. Over the coming reporting period we will create an audit process, determine the criteria for inclusion, draft audit forms and identify recommendations. Following the first round of audits the process will be reviewed and revised where necessary before rolling out subsequent audits. The process will be overseen by our Research Support Manager and Graduate School.

5. Further explore the creation of a researcher development record

We have started to explore how to monitor the engagement of researchers with professional development activities. We will continue to explore the options for the creation of a central training record for all academic research staff and PGRS. We have already identified some of the key issues with undertaking this task and begun to explore systems that could support the management of this. We will continue to review how best to collect this data for subsequent monitoring and reporting and determine what types of training could be recorded on the system.

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*)

Our Researcher Development Concordat group has responsibility for the development and review of our Concordat Action Plan.

This report was initially drafted during January 2023 by the Head of Researcher Development and Impact and the Dean of Research and the Graduate School after reflecting on progress against our published action plan.

The report was reviewed by the rest of the Researcher Development Concordat group in February 2023. Comments from the group were reviewed and changes made to the report as appropriate.

The revised report was submitted as a paper to the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee for review and approval. The report was introduced by the Dean of Research and the Graduate School at the meeting in March 2023. Committee members had the opportunity to discuss the report and raise questions or make suggested changes. No changes to the report were requested by the committee and the report was approved at the meeting.

The report was approved by the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee on the 17th May 2023 (via delegated authority for the governing body).

The final version of the report was submitted to Universities UK on 14th November 2023.

Signature on behalf of governing body: *C Summes*

Contact for queries:

This annual report will be analysed by Universities UK, 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 at CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk


www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk




Outcome Agreement between Abertay University and the Scottish Funding Council for AY 2023-24

On behalf of Abertay University:

Signed: 
Print name: Liz Bacon
Position: Principal and Vice-Chancellor
Date: 30/11/2023

Signed: 
Print name: David Brew
Position: Chair of Court
Date: 30/11/2023

On behalf of the Scottish Funding Council:

Signed: 
Print name: Karen Watt
Position: Chief Executive
Date: 15 January 2024