



# Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers **Action Plan 2024 - 2027**

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## Institutional context

The implementation of the Researcher Development Concordat is a key enabler in delivering the Research & Innovation strand of the University's Strategy 2030, related to nurturing an ambitious and empowered community of researchers across all career stages. At the end of 2024, the University will publish its second Research Culture Action Plan, designed to support research quality and a vibrant research community; actions related to the Concordat will significantly contribute to it. The Research Culture Action Plan will be enabled by a new Research Culture sub-team of 5 FTE within the Research and Enterprise Directorate, partly funded thanks to a successful bid to Wellcome's Institutional Funding for Research Culture. This team includes the existing Postdoctoral Development Centre (PDC) team, enabling it to grow from a PDC Manager and PDC Project Assistant (2 FTE) to a PDC Officer, PDC Project Assistant, Research Careers and Employability Officer and a fraction of the Research Culture Manager's time, significantly increasing capacity for research staff initiatives.

## Summary of the 2021-24 Action Plan

This Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan is the university's second action plan since the Concordat was revised in 2019.

The previous 2021-24 action plan saw significant progress in how research staff are supported in the university, notably through the growth and embedding of the Fellowship Academy and of the new Postdoctoral Development Centre (PDC) established in 2020 and 2021 respectively.

The establishment of the PDC provided research staff with a central point of contact for all queries, and brought together initiatives relevant to them, notably on the extensive PDC

website. In collaboration with other university departments, it ran a programme of development workshops (including a new well-received Postdoctoral Leadership Programme), events including career exploration events and information sessions, a career podcast, inductions and information for new staff, and introduced one-to-one job application support. It also drove initiatives aimed at improving the postdoctoral experience at Queen's, notably by coordinating the PDC Representatives' Network, organising yearly postdoc awards and National Postdoc Appreciation Week celebrations, and leading on policy activities. This notably involved introducing means to recognise postdoctoral contributions to supervision (e.g. Assistant Supervisor role), enhancing maternity leave information for individuals funded by external grants, and introducing a more adapted Personal Development Review form to improve career conversations with line managers. Another key highlight from the previous period is the establishment of a central Postdoc Society. Led by research staff, the society provided a range of opportunities for researchers to network, including yearly Postdoc Showcases, writing retreats and social and wellbeing events.

The Fellowship Academy grew its membership and focused on delivering events and networking opportunities for fellowship holders around themes as well as on leadership development. This was enhanced by Queen's involvement with the Future Leaders Fellows Development Network, which opened some opportunities to members of the Fellowship Academy.

Details of achievements from the 2021-24 period are included in the yearly Researcher Development Concordat progress statements available on the [Researcher Development Concordat page](#).

## Development of the Action Plan

The development of this Action Plan was led by the PDC, directly engaging with the PDC Representatives' Network, including postdocs and academics across the three Faculties. It incorporates suggestions and issues brought up by postdocs over the years and also involved input from other colleagues, notably from P&C and R&E.

The Postdoctoral and Research staff Oversight Group (PROG) contributed to its development and approved the final version on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 2024.

## Key Priorities – 2024 to 2027

The plan includes new actions, on-going projects or follow-up actions related to the previous 2021-24 action plan, actions from other institutional action plans (e.g. Athena Swan Gold Action Plan, Fellowship Academy Action Plan, R&E EDI Action Plan) or initiatives (e.g. Talent acquisition review, review of academic profiles etc.) particularly relevant to research staff, as well as activities considered part of the established core offering ('business as usual').

Actions in the plan are presented by concordat principle, but principally focus on the following themes:

- **Line management of researchers:** actions aim at showcasing and rewarding good line-management practices and enhancing the information and tools available to line managers of research staff.
- **Teaching opportunities and certification:** actions aim at improving consistency across the institution in relation to teaching activities carried out by postdocs, and promoting and enhancing access to teaching training and certification.
- **Support for international staff:** actions aim at facilitating the relocation of international staff to Northern Ireland by developing more specific information and induction, visa support, as well as building new staff (and student) accommodation.
- **Reward and recognition:** actions aim principally at mitigating career precarity by introducing a promotion mechanism for research staff and measures to support longer-term employment, as well as supporting initiatives that capture and recognise research staff contributions appropriately.
- **Skill development:** actions aim at maintaining a quality offering of workshops, information sessions and other relevant initiatives for postdocs (PDC) and fellows (Fellowship Academy), notably introducing new topics such as AI and interdisciplinary research (Fellowship Academy crucible).
- **Career development:** career development support will be enhanced by the employment of a dedicated Research Careers and Employability Officer, who will oversee a comprehensive suite of career-related workshops, career exploration events, one-to-one support and employer engagement.
- **Community building:** actions focus on maintaining opportunities for research staff to network, notably at inductions, Postdoc Society and Fellowship Academy events, as well as introducing a parents' network.

## Action Plan

The specific actions to be undertaken as part of this Plan are detailed below, aligned with the Concordat principles and obligations. The plan will be approached with flexibility so that important arising new projects can be accommodated and some actions re- or de-prioritised to respond to sector and institutional developments.

## Environment and Culture principle

Action	Outcome/ success measure	Timeframe	Responsibility for delivery
ECA1. Clarify expectations related to line-managing and supporting research staff, sharing examples of good practice, notably by organising a campaign for research staff to highlight positive line management practices.	Campaign completed, promoted internally and externally, with resources publicly available.	Year 1, by Sep 2025	PDC, PDC Reps Network
ECA2. Monitor and reward good practice related to line-managing and supporting research staff, notably as part of the academic progression process.	ECA2.1. New academic profiles include demonstrating leadership, supervision and line management.  ECA2.2 Promotion, Review, positive feedback (including from assessors) and/or plan for refinement as relevant.	Year 1, by Sep 2025  Year 3, by Sep 2027	PVCR&E and working group, P&C (OD), PDC (as part of review of academic profiles)
ECA3. Enhance resources and sign-posting to internal and external resources for line-managers of researchers ('researcher line-manager hub'), including in relation to supporting researcher wellbeing.	ECA3.1. Initial hub launched and promoted.  ECA3.2. Promotion, good engagement with the page, positive feedback from academics and/or refinement.	Year 1, by Sep 2025  Year 3, by Sep 2027	PDC, P&C (BP), PDC Reps' Network Academic representatives
ECA4. Embed and promote the Assistant Supervisor role and UG/PGT supervision guidance, supporting schools with implementation.	ECA4.1. Continued engagement with the Assistant Supervisor scheme with regular appointments;  ECA4.2. increasing number of Schools with processes capturing postdoctoral supervision of UG and PGT;  ECA4.3. Good engagement and feedback on overall supervision recognition.	Year 3, by Sep 2027  Year 2, by Sep 2026  Year 3, by Sep 2027	PDC, Faculties, Academic Affairs

Action	Outcome/ success measure	Timeframe	Responsibility for delivery
ECA5. Develop guidance related to the engagement of postdoctoral researchers with classroom teaching.	ECA5.1. Reasonable guidance developed with researcher and teaching professionals' input, and available on the PDC website.  ECA5.2. Implementation to start year 3 and continued in the follow up action plan (where data on success and feedback will be collected).	Year 2, by Sep 2026  Year 3, by Sep 2027	PDC, Faculties
ECA6. Investigate the possibility of enhancing assessment options to obtain a teaching certification via the Queen's Merit Award, in order to accommodate the neurodiversity of candidates.	Assessment options available.	Year 2, by Sep 2026	PVC Education & Students, CED and QMA accreditation working group (including PDC)
ECA7. Investigate the processes around email deletion at the end of contracts (and transfer to other university positions), improving notification and clarity around options to temporarily retain necessary access.	Information gathered and indicated on relevant resources (e.g. welcome booklet), recommendations for changes/improvements made.	Year 2, by Sep 2026	PDC, IS
ECA8. Enhance support for the relocation of international staff: information and visas (including developing an onboarding portal and investigating how to cover some visa costs).	ECA8.1. Virtual on-boarding portal rolled-out and rated at a minimum of 4/5.  ECA8.2. Recruitment support for visas in place and rated at a minimum of 4/5.	Year 1, by Sep 2025  Year 2, by Sep 2026	QGI, P&C (D&I, as part of the Athena Swan Gold Action Plan B1)
ECA9. Enhance support for the relocation of international staff: improve access to accommodation (build new staff accommodation, offer advice to secure guarantors, advertise opportunities for advance on salary etc.).	Accommodation and additional information ready.	Year 3, by Sep 2027	QGI, VP Students & Corporate Services/Estates (as part of the Athena Swan Gold Action Plan B2)

Action	Outcome/ success measure	Timeframe	Responsibility for delivery
ECA10. Identify initiatives available to support international staff settling into Belfast from a social perspective (including institutional inductions and welcome events for BAME/international staff) and provision for those without close friends and family nearby (e.g. for support with medical issues and ICE contact), and ensure they are communicated via PDC resources (website, welcome booklet etc.)..	ECA10.1. Induction and welcome events for all BAME/international staff introduced and rated >4/5.  ECA10.2. List of initiatives and relevant information added to appropriate resources (e.g. welcome booklet and PDC website).	Year 1, by Sep 2025  Year 2, by Sep 2026	P&C (D&I) + QGI +iRise (as part of the Athena Swan Gold Action Plan B1), PDC, Postdoc Society
ECA11. Deliver the priorities identified in the EDI in research Action Plan related to research staff, including regularly review engagement with internal fellowship selection process and internal funding allocation with an EDI lens.	EDI in research Action Plan report on actions relevant to research staff provided to PROG.	Year 2, by Sep 2026	R&E, PDC, P&C (D&I)
ECA12. Review mental health and wellbeing support for research staff and enhance as appropriate.	ECA12.1. Review conducted and input from PDC Reps' network regarding recommendations.  ECA12.2. Enhancement/additional resources introduced.	Year 1, by Sep 2025  Year 3, by Sep 2027	PDC, staff wellbeing
ECA13. Identify postdoc contributions that are not or not appropriately captured by processes and systems and make recommendations for improvement, to ensure appropriate representation of their contributions for processes such as progression, as well as profile-building.	ECA13.1. Contributions identified.  ECA13.2. Plans in place to update systems.	Year 1, by Sep 2025  Year 2, by Sep 2026	PDC, R&E

Action	Outcome/ success measure	Timeframe	Responsibility for delivery
ECA14. Better define which support should be provided centrally (PDC, OD, R&E...) and/or locally (Faculty, School, Centre) to avoid duplication, audience dilution but instead maximise resources' usage and engagement.	Subject discussed and general principles agreed by the PDC Representatives' Network and communicated to PROG.	Year 1, by Sep 2025	PDC Representatives' Network, PDC, PROG

### Employment principle

Action	Outcome/ success measure	Timeframe	Responsibility for delivery
EA1. Introduce and monitor engagement with a 'Research-only' career pathway with defined profiles across a range of grades as well as a promotion mechanism for research staff.	EA1.1. Pathway and promotion process launched.	Year 1, by Sep 2025	PVCR&E and working group, P&C (OD), PDC (as part of review of academic profiles)
	EA1.2. Report on engagement, issues and refinement (as relevant) to PROG.	Year 2 and 3	
EA2. Pilot and evaluate an institutional process to facilitate 'bridge funding' between contracts and sustain the employment of research staff when grant timing is not adequate. To include capture of short contract extension practices (reasons, sources of funding etc.) across Faculties.	EA2.1. Pilot launched and carried out for 1 year.	Year 1, by Dec 2025	PVCR&E and working group, Faculties, P&C (BP), PDC (as part of research career sustainability / FTC project)
	EA2.2. Report on engagement and refinement recommendations presented to PROG.	Year 2, by Sep 2026	
EA3. Develop guidance related to costing staff (and staff development) on grants.	Guidance available and communicated.	Year 2, by Sep 2026	PDC, Research Finance, Research Development, Faculties, P&C (BP)

Action	Outcome/ success measure	Timeframe	Responsibility for delivery
EA4. Establish a working group to shape a pilot aimed at investigating the introduction of 'shared' research specialist permanent positions aligned with a team-based approach to research.	Pilot under way, including a few permanent roles created.	Year 3, by Sep 2027	PVCR&E and working group, Faculties, P&C (BP), PDC (as part of research career sustainability / FTC project)
EA5. Run a minimum of 4 postdoc inductions per year.	Inductions provided, good engagement and feedback.	Year 1, Year 2, Year 3	PDC
EA6. Keep running yearly Postdoc awards to reward contributions to research, support and citizenship and outreach.	Awards provided, good engagement.	Year 1, Year 2, Year 3	PDC, Faculties
EA7. Deliver a range of networking opportunities for researchers across the institution to interact with each other, notably by supporting the Postdoc Society (including a yearly Postdoc Showcase event), and potentially with other postdocs across the UK/world.	Regular opportunities provided, good engagement and positive feedback.	Year 1, Year 2, Year 3	Postdoc Society/PDC, Faculties
EA8. Establish a Postdoc Parents' Network to enable research staff with children (including expecting and engaged in other types of caring activities) to learn from each other and support each other with the relevant challenges and opportunities associated with parenthood/caring responsibilities.	Network launched with structure, governance and needs of the group identified.	Year 1, by Sep 2025	PDC (include/inform P&C staff wellbeing/EDI)
EA9. Investigate needs for additional information and support for research staff in relation to maternity leave.	Needs reviewed with input from the new Postdoc Parents' Network and recommendation made.	Year 2, by Sep 2026	P&C (D&I), PDC, PDC Representatives' Network, Postdoc Parents' Network



## Professional Development principle

Action	Outcome/ success measure	Timeframe	Responsibility for delivery
PDA1. Recruit a Research Careers and Employability Officer to enhance career development support for postdocs, notably via 1:1 and small group support. Evaluate their impact.	Individual in post.	by start of Year 1, Sep 2024	PDC (part of Wellcome RCNI project)
PDA2. Engage with local employers to raise awareness of the talent pool represented by postdocs in NI and identify employers' recruitment priorities and needs, potentially providing assistance with advertisement of relevant positions.	PDA2.1. Identification of employers/ groups to engage with, at least two engagement events completed, and learnings collated.  PDA2.2. Further engagement and identification of interventions, positive feedback from employers.	Year 1, by Sep 2025  Year 2 and 3, by Sep 2027	PDC (part of Wellcome RCNI project)
PDA3. Enhance career exploration opportunities showcasing profiles of former postdocs via online and in-person events.	At least 5 career exploration events (in-person and/or online) completed yearly; good attendance and feedback.	Each year (Year 1, Year 2, Year 3)	PDC (part of Wellcome RCNI project)
PDA4. Establish an 'in-house' programme of career workshops integrated with other offering (career exploration, 1:1 support...).	PDA4.1. Initial programme of workshop provided (minimum 3 workshops), good engagement and feedback.  PDA4.2. Initial provision refined and addition sessions introduced, with good engagement and feedback.  PDA4.3. Individual support is provided, promoted and utilised, and received positive feedback.	Year 1, by Sep 2025  Year 2 and 3, by Sep 2027  Each year (Year 1, Year 2, Year 3)	PDC (part of Wellcome RCNI project)

Action	Outcome/ success measure	Timeframe	Responsibility for delivery
PDA5. Investigate ways to capture research staff career destinations and internal employment changes (e.g. appointments to academic or administrative posts).	PDA5.1. Internal career moves and promotions analysed and reported to PROG.	Year 2, by Sep 2026	PDC, P&C (BP), Alumni relations
	PDA5.2. Options to capture leavers' destination discussed and presented to PROG for decision.	Year 3, by Sep 2027	
PDA6. Keep on promoting and embedding the 10 development days for researchers and new PDR resources (e.g. collate and display on the website some examples of how postdocs at Queen's use their 10 development days to inspire others), including with line managers.	Examples collected and added to the PDC website.	Year 1, by Sep 2025; regular updates after that	PDC
PDA7. Introduce a session to cover helpful tools and ethical applications related to AI for everyday research.	Session piloted and positive feedback or suggestions for improvement collated.	Year 2, by Sep 2026	PDC, R&E (liaising with CED)
PDA8. Keep offering a range of workshops and development opportunities across a range of themes.	Regular opportunities provided, good engagement and positive feedback.	Year 1, Year 2, Year 3	PDC, OD, R&E, CED
PDA9. Keep offering and enhancing funding application support.	Regular opportunities provided, good engagement and positive feedback.	Year 1, Year 2, Year 3	R&E (RD)
PDA10. Keep offering information sessions as part of the 'Postdoc Life' series (min 3/year).	Regular opportunities provided, good engagement and positive feedback.	Year 1, Year 2, Year 3	PDC
PDA11. Keep promoting and supporting free access to teaching certification via the QMA.	Regularly advertised, good engagement.	Year 1, Year 2, Year 3	CED, PDC
PDA12. Keep running writing retreats for research staff (min 2 per year).	Regular opportunities provided, good engagement and positive feedback.	Year 1, Year 2, Year 3	Postdoc Society/PDC, OD
PDA13. Pilot a 'UNIque book club' for women research staff to reflect on their career development and discuss it as a supportive cohort in an informal setting.	Pilot run, with feedback enabling to decide on the value of repeating it (including refining concept).	Year 1, by Sep 2025	PDC

Action	Outcome/ success measure	Timeframe	Responsibility for delivery
PDA14. The Fellowship Academy will continue to deliver learning activities and networking opportunities for Fellows, including by introducing the Queen's Crucible Programme to encourage the development of interdisciplinary partnerships and longer-term collaborations.	Regular opportunities provided, good engagement and positive feedback.	Year 1, Year 2, Year 3	OD/R&E (RD)
	Crucible Programme piloted and evaluated.	Year 1, by Sep 2025	
PDA15. Deliver on the Fellowship Academy Plan 2024-27, with the updated themes to reflect current priorities and needs of Fellows (Impact & Innovation, and Interdisciplinary Research and Collaboration).	Events and activities delivered to address the themes; good engagement and positive feedback.	Year 1, Year 2, Year 3; full plan delivered by Sep 2027	OD/R&E (RD)