Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Action Plan 2021 - 2024

Background

The landscape of researcher support at Queen's has evolved significantly in recent years, particularly during the period 2018 – 2021, which saw the introduction of a number of new support structures, including:

- The Fellowship Academy (January 2020): Supports holders of internal and external postdoctoral fellowships and new investigator awards through community-building, leadership development, support with funding applications, and mentoring for the transition to an academic career.
- The Postdoctoral and Researcher Oversight Group (PROG; November 2020): New committee which combines two previous groups to provide a single central representative body with responsibility for overseeing research staff support structures and policy, and linked into institutional governance structures.
- The Postdoctoral Development Centre (PDC) pilot in the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences (January 2018): A pilot initiative trialling the benefits of a single 'one stop shop' providing relevant information, support and guidance for research staff.

Evidence base for the Action Plan

Building upon these developments, a gap analysis was undertaken as part of the process for developing this Action Plan. With input from researcher and academic representatives, as well professional support staff in Research & Enterprise and People & Culture. The analysis identified several findings that would form the basis of priorities for the next period of Concordat implementation, including:

- Lack of a clear, dedicated, central point of reference for research staff
- Lack of awareness around policies and procedures, e.g. 10 development days
- Lack of coordination between various units that support researchers
- Lack of harmonisation of institutional policies and procedures
- Lack of support for Faculty-level researcher-led societies

Institutional context

The University's new strategic vision – Strategy 2030 – places significant emphasis on nurturing a vibrant research culture, with an ambitious and empowered community of researchers at the heart of this. It commits to enhancing researcher excellence across all career stages and, as part of this, establishing an institutional Postdoctoral Development Centre (PDC).

Linked to this, the institutional Research Culture Action Plan (RCAP) identifies, as one of its five strategic priorities, the need to "respect and facilitate the diverse range of career pathways that exist within research, both in and out of academia, and provide tailored support to attract and retain talent across the research community".

Key Priorities – 2021 to 2024

Building upon the significant progress made since 2018, the findings of the gap analysis, and the commitments made in Strategy 2030, a detailed business case was developed and approved for an institutional Postdoctoral Development Centre (PDC) – following on from the success of the MHLS faculty pilot.

To be launched in October 2021, the PDC represents a significant milestone for researcher support at Queens: the establishment of a central and coordinated 'one stop shop' for postdoctoral and research staff across all three faculties, providing advice, support and guidance across the 'postdoc experience'.

The PDC will work in concert with other professional support teams and faculty offices to coordinate the University's Concordat Action Plan. In doing so, three main areas of priority focus have been identified: Awareness, Provision and Consistency – which each align with one or more Concordat principles.

- **Awareness**: Ensure researchers are aware of the support available to them and how to access it. This will involve, via the new PDC, providing a clear first point of contact for all researcher-related queries, designing a new website regrouping learning and development offering, opportunities, policies and other resources, and reviewing the induction process.
- **Provision**: Ensure high-quality support and resources are provided across the main areas of interest for personal and career development. This will include introducing one-to-one career support for researchers and new resources where gaps have been identified, such as transitioning beyond academia. We will better coordinate career support between the different departments involved, to allow for better use of resources, and will support the University's ambitions for a continuum in research careers, with individuals at any stage being able to benefit, and benefit from, individuals at other stages.
- **Consistency**: Improve the consistency of the experience of researchers across different parts of the institution, initially by extending the remit of the Postdoctoral Development Centre beyond the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences. We will also review policies, procedures and practices applying to researchers, and, as relevant, clarify key information for researchers. To consistently review this, and ensure support is fit for purpose, we will create a network of representatives championing the Concordat principles and institutional initiatives across faculties and schools.

Action Plan

The specific actions to be undertaken as part of this Plan are detailed below, aligned with the Concordat pillars and obligations. The **Appendix** (available on the Researcher Development Concordat Page) provides further detail on the responsible units for each action, success measures, and target completion dates.

Environment and Culture

Obligation	Action
EC1. Ensure that all relevant staff are aware of the Concordat.	1. New institutional PDC will publish a central website to act as a single point of reference for information for researchers, including the Concordat
	2. Processes for new staff (advertisements, new appointment materials, induction) will incorporate an overview of the Concordat, the PDC, and other relevant supports
EC2. Ensure that institutional policies and practices relevant to researchers are inclusive, equitable and transparent, and are well-communicated to researchers and their managers.	1. New institutional PDC will be launched to a) represent the interests of all researchers in the development of new policies and procedures, and b) identify gaps in existing policy or guidance which are relevant to but do not make specific provisions for research staff (e.g. supervision, teaching)
	2. Postdoctoral and Research Staff Oversight Group (PROG) will act as a single representative committee to consult on strategies, policies and procedures relevant to researchers and feed into institutional governance structures via representation on R&I Committee
	3. New PDC website will sign-post to policies and procedures relevant to researchers, including user-friendly and accessible overview
	4. New PDC website will focus on improving the accessibility of new and existing online resources and develop an accessibility checklist for PDC events
EC3. Promote good mental health and wellbeing through, for example, the effective management of workloads and people, and effective policies and practice for tackling discrimination, bullying and harassment, including providing appropriate support for those reporting issues. EC4. Ensure that managers of researchers are effectively trained in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion, wellbeing and mental health.	1. New workshop will be developed on personal effectiveness and time management, focussing on benefits for research outcomes, personal wellbeing etc.
	2. Learning and development opportunities around resilience and wellbeing will be provided for researchers as part of core offering
	3. Wider institutional review of bullying and harassment policies will consider issues specific to research staff as part of its remit

	4. Consolidated effort to promote relevant policies and approaches to addressing 'cultural' issues, including bullying and harassment, to researchers and their managers, as well as available learning resources (e.g. relevant courses on LinkedIn Learning)
	5. Work with the postdoctoral community and managers to develop best-practice guidelines on work-life balance for researchers
	6. Consolidated push to ensure high completion rates of the mandatory diversity and inclusion training module amongst researchers and their managers
EC5. Ensure researchers and their managers are aware of, and act in accordance with, the highest standards of research integrity.	1. Continued annual implementation of the Research Integrity Concordat across the institution, with researcher engagement encouraged by the PDC
	2. Promote and facilitate the Epigeum online course on good research practice to researchers
	3. Review the learning and development offering in responsible research practices, data management and research integrity as pertains to researchers, and publish new or complementary online guidance, particularly for fellowship applicants
	4. Encourage academic departments to introduce initiatives to facilitate open discussion and perpetuate good research practice (e.g. journal clubs, lab meetings)
	5. Establish a peer-network for postdocs to advise and support each other in relation to good practices in research, including experimental design, analysis, ethics application preparation etc.
	6. Work with academic departments to facilitate opportunities for researchers to present and receive peer feedback on their research, internally and externally
EC6. Regularly review and report on the quality of the research environment and culture, including seeking feedback from researchers, and use the outcomes to improve institutional practices.	1. Work with Faculties/ Schools to ensure that School Management Board meetings include a standing item on postdoctoral researchers and ideally include a postdoctoral representative
	2. Full implementation of Research Culture Action Plan (RCAP) actions that relate to researchers and collect specific feedback on researchers via wider culture surveys
	3. Establish a representative network, including postdocs and academics from across Queens, to report issues and challenges, share local examples of best practice, and champion the Concordat

Employment

Obligation	Actions
E1. Ensure open, transparent and merit-based recruitment, which attracts excellent researchers, using fair and inclusive selection and appointment practices.	1. Review current practice for costing research staff on grants to ensure sufficient funding is available to offer competitive salaries and attract/retain the best talent
E2. Provide an effective induction, ensuring that researchers are integrated into the community and are aware of policies and practices relevant to their position.	1. Review induction processes for new research staff to provide relevant and up-to-date information, including: • Regularly updated 'welcome booklet' provided to all new starts • Overview of all relevant policies/ procedures, and sign-posting to PDC website
	2. Extend the availability of buddy/ peer mentoring schemes beyond initial MHLS pilot to encompass all three faculties
E3. Provide clear and transparent merit-based recognition, reward and promotion pathways that recognise the full range of researchers' contributions, and the diversity of personal circumstances.	1. Annual celebration for National Postdoc Appreciation Week, to include annual postdoc awards for each faculty, and continually review the programme based on feedback each year
	2. Continue to offer two dedicated categories as part of institutional Vice-Chancellor's Research Prizes, i.e. Postdoctoral Researcher & Early-Career Researcher
	3. Review processes for recognising contribution of postdocs to research outputs, grants etc., including via introduction of the CREDIT Taxonomy and Narrative CVs as part of Research Culture Action Plan
	4. In line with commitments made in Strategy 2030 and RCAP, conduct a systemic review of institutional policies and support for career pathways for those employed on 'research only' contracts with a view to creating a dedicated 'Research' pathway
	5. Launch a further recruitment process to the Illuminate Vice-Chancellor's Fellowship scheme
E4. Provide effective line and project management training opportunities for managers of researchers, heads of department and equivalent.	1. Consolidated effort to promote the "People Manager Essentials" programme and other resources for managers of fixed-term researchers, modifying/adding new resources as required (e.g. adapted PDR for researchers)
	2. Provide leadership and management development opportunities for independent fellows and early-career researchers (e.g. mentoring/coaching) notably via the Fellowship Academy

E5. Ensure that excellent people management is championed throughout the organisation and embedded in institutional culture, through annual appraisals, transparent promotion criteria, and workload allocation.	1. Leadership, management and citizenship will continue to be monitored through annual PDR and Academic Progression processes, and ongoing reviews of workload allocation and Academic Progression will take input from the PDC and PROG to ensure researcher needs and concerns are addressed Also see E.4.1
E6. Seek to improve job security for researchers, for example through more effective redeployment	1. Better promote internal career opportunities to fixed-term researchers. PDC will work with P&C and others to help promote better understanding of existing recruitment processes, such as redeployment, internal and externally advertised opportunities Also see E.3.4

People, Culture and Career Development

Obligation	Actions
PCD1. Provide opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in a minimum of 10 days professional development pro rata per year, recognising that researchers will pursue careers across a wide range of employment sectors.	1. Consolidate effort to promote the commitment to 10 annual career development days to researchers and their managers in all faculties
PCD2. Provide training, structured support, and time for managers to engage in meaningful career development reviews with their researchers.	2. Review data on uptake of learning and development opportunities, as well as feedback from faculty societies, to better understand levels of engagement across the institution (including with the 10 days policy)
	3. Conduct a review of existing training opportunities across the institution to a) present comprehensive information on the PDC website and b) identify gaps in current provision
	4. Scope the potential for accredited/ qualifying programmes for researcher cohorts (e.g. project management)
	5. Continue to deliver, and expand where possible, the Postdoctoral Group Mentoring programme
	6. Conduct a review of existing training and accreditation opportunities for teaching available to researchers (e.g. AF-HEA) and bring forward recommendations where appropriate Also see E.4.1

PCD3. Ensure that researchers have access to professional advice on career management, across a breadth of careers.	1. Develop and implement a comprehensive and complementary suite of career development support between the PDC, OD, Graduate School etc.
	2. Introduce one-to-one advisory support provided on demand via the PDC for researchers, encompassing informal advice, feedback on applications, interview preparation, and mock interviews etc., and via relevant R&E teams for e.g. research funding, collaborative research, commercialisation
PCD4. Provide researchers with opportunities, and time, to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills.	1. Review current leadership development opportunities for researchers and enhance as required
	2. Fully implement the role of 'Assistant Supervisor' across the institution, building on MHLS pilot, and provide training for postdoctoral researchers taking up the role
	3. Enhance existing support for those applying for individual fellowships, notably by expanding funders showcases and learning and development opportunities
	4. Develop and launch a new mentoring programme via the Fellowship Academy for prospective fellowship applicants to learn from existing independent fellows
	5. Develop and implement a new mentoring scheme for postdoctoral researchers to support postgraduate research students
	6. Develop an 'introduction to mentoring' training workshop for postdoctoral researchers and independent fellows to upskill those serving as mentors
	7. Investigate the potential for postdoctoral researchers to propose/supervise research projects for UG/PGT students
	8. Launch a pilot seed fund for faculty societies or groups of researchers to bid into for events that benefit the wider researcher community
PCD5. Recognise that moving between, and working across, employment sectors can bring benefits to research and researchers, and support opportunities for researchers to experience this.	1. Organise career exploration events and interviews with former Queen's postdoctoral researchers and PhD students working in a range of sectors
	2. Investigate opportunities for engagement with local employers, including via site visits and shadowing programmes
	3. Encourage engagement with innovation and commercialisation programmes, especially in which the postdoc/researcher is lead

	4. Create an "Alumni" group for postdocs on LinkedIn, to promote role models and examples of career progression and destination (potentially by Faculty) as well as investigate more impactful ways of collecting and showcasing career destinations
PCD6. Monitor, and report on, the engagement of researchers and their managers with professional development activities, and researcher career development reviews.	1. Conduct regular surveys of researchers via the PDC (or other departments and staff initiatives) to measure the progress against the Concordat, and publish a report on the PDC website identifying examples of best practice and amendments to the Plan See also PCD.1.2 and E.4.1