

# Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

## Institutional Annual progress report 2021-22

This statement was reviewed and approved by the Postdoctoral and Research staff Oversight Group (PROG) on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2022, and published online on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2022.

### Institutional strategic 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), which is a main feature of this year's Researcher Development Concordat implementation.

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”. This includes a commitment to undertaking a programme of work to address issues relating to career advancement, development and progression for those staff employed on Research Only ('R') contracts at the University, directly aligned to the RD Concordat.

### 2021-22 progress

#### Environment and culture

- Establishment of the Postdoctoral Development Centre (PDC) and associated resources (EC1.1, EC2.1, EC2.3)

The PDC was launched in October 2021 based on a Faculty pilot initiative. Now centrally-based and with two members of staff (PDC Manager and Project Assistant), the PDC supports the delivery of bespoke resources and the development of a positive environment and culture for all research staff at Queen's. Engagement with events and workshops was very good in this first year; for example, three new PDC workshops were introduced in identified provision gaps received a total of 89 attendees, average rating of 4.7/5 and were all recommended by 100% of feedback respondents (more in further sections).

The PDC website hosts information on the Concordat (including downloadable action plan), practical information and signposting to development resources, lists of courses and events, as well as a 'policy and guidance section. This section regroups signposting to relevant policy, with emphasis of how they apply to research staff, as well as information on general practices and expectations in the university. Such pages include: the concordat, 10 days

policy, PDR, supervision of PhD students and Assistant Supervisor role, Teaching guidelines, Dealing with issues with colleagues, professional membership payment, applying for funding (some will be further developed in upcoming years)

- Committees and representation (EC2.2, EC6.1, EC6.3)

The Postdoctoral and Research staff Oversight Group met three times in 2021-22 and welcomed its new chair, Prof Denise Fitzgerald. Including voices from academics and postdocs across faculties, as well as relevant professional services departments, the committee oversaw the progress of the PDC and the implementation of the Concordat, feeding back into the Research and Innovation committee.

A network of representatives (~35) from across the University's schools was established and met bi-monthly from January 2022. Led by the PDC, it includes academic and postdoc members contributing to PDC initiatives but also leading initiatives locally. Based on the ongoing survey (95 responses at time of writing), ~8 months after the establishment of the network, 63% of research staff know who their local representatives are.

At the start of September 2022, almost all of the 17 Schools and Centres (all but 3; currently investigating the best format) had postdoctoral representation embedded within their committee structure, as relevant locally. For most, this was done through their Research Committee or School Board. A few also have a specific postdoc or PRG/postdoc committee, and most also involve postdocs in their education committee, Athena Swan committee, H&S committee, Research Culture committee etc.

- Accessibility of PDC resources (EC2.4)

The new PDC website is regularly monitored for accessibility, with reports created every other week and any issue dealt with quickly to ensure viewers requiring the use of a screen-reader to navigate the website can smoothly access the content. In August 2022, its Siteimprove accessibility score was 96%, more than 10% higher than the industry benchmark (82.4%). All the documents uploaded on the website have passed the MS Word accessibility test.

An event accessibility checklist was drafted to ensure the events organised by the PDC are as inclusive as possible to individuals from diverse cultures, genders, levels of caring responsibility, body ability etc. It has been shared with the EDI team and will be regularly updated.

- Resilience training (EC3/4.2)

In addition to a range of wellbeing sessions and events provided to all staff, the Organisational Development (OD) team provided the 'Resilience in a research environment' workshop twice in 2021-22, with a total of 19 researchers attending.

- Work-life balance advice (EC3/4.5)

A working group established as part of the PDC Representatives' Network developed content for a new page for the PDC website on the topic of work-life balance for postdocs. It includes sign-posting to relevant policies and guidance as well as practical tips for postdocs and managers. After consultation (including from PROG and P&C), the page is ready to be launched once another related initiative from P&C is released.

- Research integrity (EC5.1, EC5.2, EC5.3)

Queen's has been complying with the Research Integrity Concordat, with a statement due to be released in November 2022.

The Research Governance team provided training on trusted research, research ethics, HTA, consent etc. and the links to the relevant governance pages were made available on the PDC website ('methodologies and practices' section), as well as mentioned during the new postdoc induction. This is complemented by Research Data Management training as well as ResponsibiliTea journal clubs that were organised by researchers during the year.

An online video on ethical concerns and data management for those preparing a fellowship application was added to the PDC's fellowship application training video series.

Early survey results (survey ongoing; 95 responses at time of writing) suggest that provision around research integrity and good practice is positively received (~26% very satisfied, ~43% somewhat satisfied, ~4% somewhat dissatisfied and ~1% very dissatisfied; other neutral or don't know).

The Epigeum online integrity training package was also made available to research staff and promoted by the PDC (induction, booklet, website etc.). The Research Governance team however feels that there isn't much engagement with it and intends to replace it with other sessions and materials in the future.

## Employment

- Welcoming new research staff (E2.1, E2.2; also EC1.2)

In addition to hosting a stand on the two (virtual) welcome events for all staff this year, the PDC introduced a new 'New Postdoc Induction' session in March 2022 (online), which was repeated in May (in-person). The aim was to provide information to help research staff make the best of their time at Queen's, including understanding the context of university research, the concordat, their role, the support available, how to progress their career and relevant policies applying to them. A total of 23 research staff attended and feedback was excellent (rated 5/5 and recommended by 100% - responses from 11 attendees).

A 'New Postdoc Welcome Booklet' with detailed practical information for new postdocs (>50 pages) was also developed and made available on the PDC website in March 2022.

In addition, People & Culture (P&C) added information related to the 10 career development days for research staff, the PDC and the Concordat in the communications all new research staff receive when appointed.

In Faculties, Schools and Centres, welcoming/buddy schemes are being implemented or developed (at least for 5 of them at time of writing, with other units planning adapted ways to welcome new researchers locally, notably thanks to good practice shared via the PDC Representatives' Network).

- Awards and recognition (E3.1, E3.2)

Due to the COVID pandemics, National Postdoc Appreciation Week had to be celebrated online in September 2021. The PDC took part in the organisation of the UK-wide event 'Celebrating successes - exploring diverse careers in the Postdoc afterlife' with other universities, and was a member of the steering committee and session chair for the National PostDoc Conference 2021. Queen's postdocs were encouraged to attend.

The announcement of the winners of the 2021 PDC Postdoc Awards was a prominent feature of NPAW and created a strong positive engagement on Twitter. The award categories recognised contributions to research, support of students and group, and citizenship and outreach. A total of 93 nominations were received and 8 awards and 10 commendations were granted.

The Vice-Chancellor's Research Prizes were organised again this year, with one 'Postdoc' and one 'Early Career Researcher' announced in January 2022.

An in-person Postdoc Showcase event and the postdoc awards have been organised for September 2022 and will be reported in next year's statement.

- Leadership and management for independent fellows (E4.2)

In addition to access to leadership courses for all staff and Postdoctoral Leadership Programme (even if not priority), members of the Fellowship Academy (FA) were provided with the opportunity to attend the AdvanceHE Research Team Leadership Programme (Jan 2022; 3 FA attendees) and the 'Leadership In Action Programme', alongside participants from a range of UK universities (6 FA attendees). Feedback from participants in both programmes has been very positive.

- Research career pathway (E3.4)

Initial scoping and discussions have taken place at PROG and between the Research Strategy and Engagement team and P&C, with first plans being drafted. Deliverables on this project are expected in the next few years. These actions weren't meant to be completed in 2021-22.

## Professional and Career Development

- Promoting the 10 career development days policy (PCD1.1)

As mentioned in the Environment and Culture and Employment sections, the introduction of the PDC, its website, induction etc. enabled to promote this relatively recent policy (2019). Based on initial 2021-22 survey data (95 responses at time of writing), 58% research staff were aware of the 10 days policy before reading the survey. Further consolidation is expected in 2022-23, in line with further planned actions.

- Providing comprehensive training and learning and development (PCD2.3, PCD3.1, PCD4.1)

A review of workshops and learning and development provision was conducted in summer 2021, with a list of core workshops for research staff published on the PDC website. In order to fill gaps identified in the provision, new workshops and programmes were introduced: Postdoctoral Leadership Programme (20 attendees, 4.6/5 rating, recommended by 100%), 'Lectureships: Ready, Set, go!' (22 attendees, 4.7/5 rating, recommended by 100%), 'Defining your career: Pathways for success' (10 attendees), 'Supervising skills for Assistant Supervisors and postdocs' (47 attendees, 4.8/5 rating, recommended by 100%), as well as two workshops on fellowships (147 attendees total).

- Providing individual support (PCD2.5, PCD3.2)

Via the PDC, 'on-demand' one-to-one support became available to research staff. More than 60 h were spent on such support, which included feedback on CVs and job applications as

well as personalised interview preparation (both rated 5/5 and recommended by 100% of respondents). This complemented one-to-one career support provided to the 24 participants of the 'Developing your research career' programme.

Support was also provided to 106 Fellowship and Early Career Award applications in 2021-22, from postdoctoral researchers and eligible early academics. This included feedback on draft proposals as well as 12 mock interviews, in addition to early-stage discussions to identify the appropriate course of action for prospective applicants. Out of these proposals, 18 were funded so far.

The Postdoc Group Mentoring Scheme included 38 mentees this year, with the majority (6 out of 7 respondents) rating the programme as very good or good, and recommending it to colleagues.

Mentoring was also provided as part of a range of innovation programmes, which included 26 Queen's research staff this year.

- Improving experiences and recognition of supervision (PCD4.2, PCD4.7)

The Assistant Supervisor role, officially recognising contributions of postdocs to the supervision of PGR students was widened to all three Faculties for the start on the 2021-22 academic year. The PDC processed 43 Assistant Supervisor appointments in the year (13 in MHLS, 20 in EPS and 10 in AHSS), showing good engagement.

Recommendations to improve the experience of postdocs involved in supervising UG and PGT students were developed based on existing good practice and a postdoc survey on the topic. They will be presented to committees in early 2022-23.

- Encouraging and supporting postdoc-led initiatives (PCD4.8)

Funding (and administrative support) was provided by the PDC to a group of postdocs organising a 'Postdoc Showcase' event for September 2022.

Additional postdoc-led initiatives were funded through the Research Culture Seed Fund, with administrative support from the PDC. This included ECRday 2022, 2-day online career event for AHSS research staff and students, and the establishment of a cross Faculty network of research staff in the Schools of Psychology, Nursing and Midwifery, and Social Sciences, Education and Social Work (to take place in 2022-23).

- Career exploration (PCD5.1, PCD5.4)

A series of online interviews (5 sessions, 9 guests) of former postdocs or PhDs with a range of careers (in and out of academia) was provided. They were well-received, with an average rating of 4.7/5 and 100 attendees overall. They were recorded and made available as episodes of the PDC podcast, 'The theory of the postdoc evolution'.

A LinkedIn was made available to all Queen's current and past research staff, to enable them to build their networks and identify potential career options; at time of writing it counted 117 members.

- Monitoring and transparency (PCD6.1)

In addition to short consultation surveys on topics being investigated during the year (e.g. supervision), a more in depths survey of the experience of research staff is being carried out at time of writing (closing end of September 2022). An annual report of the PDC activities

has been published on the PDC website and shared by email, and a page of the PDC website with the main ongoing projects for the year is regularly updated with progress.

## **Notes on challenges, delays and changes to the plan**

### Short delays:

- Work-life balance page (EC3/4.5): while the content of the page is ready, it is expected to be made accessible after other staff resources are launched by P&C (expected by December 2022). Further work will include means to disseminate and raise awareness.
- Research Integrity Concordat (EC5.1): Compliance statement expected to be approved by relevant committees in November 2022
- Supervision of UG and PGT projects (PCD4.7)
- This statement (PCD6.1) is expected to be published online after September 2022, due to the time required to get it presented at the relevant committees.

### Challenges and longer delays:

- Transcripts for the PDC training videos and podcasts (EC2.4): for accessibility reasons, we intend to provide transcripts for video and audio resources via the Mediasite platform hosting them. Transcription services are provided in priority to teaching resources for students, which have increased significantly with the introduction of online teaching. Resources for staff have not been processed yet.
- Re-opening of the Illuminate Vice-Chancellor's Fellowship scheme (E3.5): initially due to re-open for application in summer 2022 (after closing due to a recruitment freeze during COVID), the scheme may only re-open for recruitment in December 2022. This is mainly due to high pressure on the P&C recruitment following several departures in the department and adjustment of some progression procedures for fellows.

### Changes (including for future years):

- Research Integrity training review (EC5.3): the review of research integrity training available due to take place in 2021-22 will be carried out in 2022-23. Discussions are already under way to organise information session on timely topics such as trusted research and export control.
- Epigeum integrity online training (EC5.2): while engagement with the resources cannot actually be monitored, it appears that it is poorly used and the Research Governance team decided to stop providing it from 2022-23. This action will thus be removed from the plan for 2022-24. The course will be replaced as deemed appropriate by the review mentioned in the previous point.
- Vice-Chancellor's Research Prizes (E3.2): After running as usual in 2021-22, the VC Research Prizes were paused and reviewed, notably because the duplication with the PDC Postdoc Awards, introduced more recently but with a wider range of contributions, profiles and individuals recognised, was causing some confusion and unnecessary duplication. Having only one flagship scheme in the future will enable to focus on the wider and deeper reward and recognition contained within the PDC Awards.

## Key objectives for 2022-23

- Progress and consolidate the actions from 2021-22, especially when delayed
- Improving research staff's understanding of their environment

Notably introduce regular 'Postdoc life' seminars to highlight policies and practices applying to them at the University as well as in the Research & Innovation sector in general (e.g. open research, narrative CV, DORA, the new bullying and harassment policy, getting supervision and teaching recognised etc.).

- Ensure forums are available to discuss good research practice
- Promote and support more postdoc-led initiatives
- Research Career Pathway

Provide recommendations to enable a research-only career pathway at Queen's, with clarity around the mechanisms enabling to transition between stages.

Review the PDR process for researchers.

- Review data on uptake of learning and development opportunities
- Expend fellowship support, notably via mentoring
- Review access and recognition for postdocs' involvement in teaching
- Promote support and mentoring of PhD students by postdocs
- Promote engagement with local employers and present different career options