

Researcher Development

Supporting researchers to grow, lead and thrive

Purpose and priorities 2026/27

1. Purpose

Researcher Development is part of Edinburgh Research Office and contributes to the University of Edinburgh's research ambitions by strengthening the capability, confidence, leadership and career development of researchers and research leaders. Through direct support, institutional leadership and partnership working, the team helps create the conditions for excellent, responsible and inclusive research.

We support researchers across the University of Edinburgh through training, resources, advice, coaching, mentoring, careers support, leadership development and community-building activity. The team also plays a strategic institutional role in enhancing the research environment, including by leading implementation of the Research Cultures Action Plan and the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

Researcher Development team	
Head of Researcher Development	Dr Fiona Philippi
Head of Research Cultures	Alex Peden
Researcher Development Manager	Nicola Cuthbert
Senior Researcher Developer	Dr Emily Woollen
Research Staff Careers Consultant	Eleanor Hennige
Research Staff Careers Consultant	Dr Darcey Gillie
Senior Events Officer (Researcher Development)	Julie Daubenspeck

2. Our distinct contribution

Researcher Development brings together specialist expertise in researcher careers, professional development, research leadership, mentoring, coaching and research cultures. Our distinctive contribution is to connect direct support for researchers with institutional insight, sector intelligence and action.

The team provides a cross-institutional view of the experiences, needs and aspirations of research staff, Principal Investigators (PIs) and research leaders at Edinburgh. Through direct engagement, delivery, consultation, evaluation, partnership working and sector networks, we build insight into the lived experience of research across the University.

We use this evidence to inform institutional work on researcher development, Concordat delivery, research cultures and the wider research environment. By identifying common needs, emerging pressures and effective practice within Edinburgh and across the sector, we shape development provision, support local action, inform

institutional priorities and contribute to wider practice in researcher careers, research leadership and positive research cultures.

Our external engagement enables us to benchmark provision, share Edinburgh practice, learn from other institutions and respond to emerging developments in the research environment

3. How we support researchers

Researcher Development provides an integrated programme of development, careers and leadership support for researchers and research leaders. Through workshops, events, resources, consultations, coaching, mentoring, writing retreats, peer learning and community-building, we support researchers to strengthen their research practice, develop their careers, build networks and contribute to positive research cultures.

We work with Schools, Colleges, Centres and Institutes to ensure support is practical, inclusive, accessible and relevant across career stages, disciplines and locations.

4. Our strategic institutional role

In addition to researcher-facing provision, the team leads institutional frameworks, governance and partnership activity that support researcher careers, research leadership and positive research cultures. Evidence from our engagement with researchers and research leaders informs this work and helps connect individual and local experience with institutional priorities.

This includes:

- leading development, delivery and monitoring of the Research Cultures Action Plan
- leading development, delivery and monitoring of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers
- convening and supporting relevant University groups, including the Concordat Implementation Group, Research Cultures Delivery Group and Research Cultures Forum
- developing and maintaining the Research Staff Hub webpages
- providing strategic researcher development leadership across the research lifecycle, working in partnership with the Doctoral College to support alignment of development provision for Postgraduate Researchers, supervisors, research staff and PIs
- contributing to implementation of the University's Research and Innovation Strategy

- contributing to the University's REF2029 preparations
- working in partnership with Schools, Colleges, professional services and researcher communities
- building and maintaining external connections that inform and strengthen our work

5. Context for 2026/27

The team's position within Edinburgh Research Office creates new and deeper opportunities to connect researcher development and research cultures with the University's wider research ambitions. In 2026/27, we will focus on strengthening these connections, increasing the visibility and accessibility of our support, and contributing to a positive and ambitious research environment. Our approach will be collaborative, evidence-informed and partnership-based. We will work with Schools, Colleges, professional services, researcher communities and external partners to understand needs, share practice, align activity and support sustainable improvements in the research environment.

Alongside our established provision, we will maintain capacity for exploratory work, scanning the horizon for emerging researcher and research leader needs, piloting new approaches, and testing responses to developments in the research environment. Where exploratory projects show value, we will evaluate them and consider sustainable models for embedding them into core provision.

This plan builds on the delivery, evaluation and learning from 2025/26, which are summarised in the Researcher Development Annual Review and Evaluation Report. It sets out our purpose, priorities and planned areas of work for 2026/27.

6. Priorities for 2026/27

Our eight priorities are organised around four strategic themes:



Theme A: Researcher growth, practice and careers

Priority 1: Enhance the accessibility, relevance and quality of development support and training for research staff

We will continue to provide a coherent, inclusive and responsive programme of development activity for research staff across the University. This provision supports researchers to develop their skills, confidence, careers, networks and research practice.

In 2026/27, we will:

- deliver a University-wide programme of workshops, events and development opportunities

- support researchers with induction, writing, communication, public engagement, collaboration, project management, research practice and professional development
- maintain and develop online resources and self-paced learning
- engage with Schools, Colleges, Centres and Institutes to understand local researcher development needs and share relevant support, resources and insight
- ensure provision is accessible, inclusive and responsive to researchers across career stages, disciplines and locations
- use feedback and evidence to continue improving the quality and relevance of our support

Intended outcomes

Research staff are better able to access and use relevant development opportunities and resources that strengthen their professional growth, research practice, confidence, networks and career development.

Priority 2: Strengthen career development and transitions support for research staff

We will continue to provide practical and timely careers support for research staff (on fixed term or open ended with review dates contracts), responding to high demand and the wider employment context. We will place particular emphasis on encouraging researchers to engage with career planning earlier in their contracts.

In 2026/27, we will:

- provide one-to-one career development consultations
- deliver workshops, briefings, panels and resources on academic and non-academic career options
- strengthen support for Narrative CVs, employment sectors, networking, applications and interviews
- help researchers identify and articulate their skills across academic, non-academic, policy, entrepreneurial and leadership contexts
- continue targeted outreach and communications through Schools, Colleges and researcher networks
- maintain links with external partners including Skills Development Scotland, PACE, Prosper and researcher career networks
- use consultation themes and feedback to inform future careers provision

Intended outcomes

Research staff are better supported to plan their careers, navigate transitions, understand their options and make informed decisions earlier and more confidently.

Priority 3: Develop mentoring, coaching and peer support as effective, scalable and impactful forms of development

We will strengthen mentoring, coaching and peer support as personalised and reflective forms of development for researchers and research leaders. This work will focus on quality, scalability, clarity of expectations and peer learning.

In 2026/27, we will:

- strengthen Postdoc Mentoring Circles for mentors and mentees through clearer expectations, practical tools and additional support
- embed academic mentoring support into core provision
- continue coaching provision for research staff, PIs, research leaders and Chancellor's Fellows
- develop coaching capacity by piloting a small-scale internal coaching pool and exploring sustainable models for future provision
- begin to grow a coaching culture by embedding coaching approaches into leadership development, peer learning, group coaching and reflective practice
- support Schools, Centres, Institutes and Colleges to develop effective local mentoring practice
- evaluate mentoring and coaching provision to understand impact, accessibility, sustainability and future development

Intended outcomes
Researchers and research leaders are better able to access effective mentoring, coaching and peer support that enables reflection, confidence, effective leadership practice, career development and community building.

Theme B: Research Leadership

Priority 4: Strengthen support for Principal Investigators and research leaders

We will continue to develop a clear, coherent and visible programme of support for Principal Investigators and research leaders. This work will help research leaders develop the confidence, knowledge, skills and competencies they need to lead research, support people, manage complexity and contribute to positive research cultures.

In 2026/27, we will:

- deliver and evaluate the Research Leader Programme
- evaluate the Participative Leadership and Futures Thinking provision
- develop induction materials for new PIs, in consultation with relevant stakeholders

- continue the Scottish Research Leaders Network in partnership with other Scottish HEIs
- embed group coaching into Research Leader Programme cohorts
- embed leadership coaching and leadership development consultations
- maintain and develop self-paced online resources for PIs and research leaders
- work with Edinburgh Research Office colleagues to connect PI development with research strategy, funding, impact, governance, collaboration and responsible research practice
- co-create and co-lead the new mid-career strategic research leadership programme with the Research Strategy Team

Intended outcomes
Principal Investigators and research leaders can access relevant, high-quality support that strengthens research leadership, people management, collaboration, strategic planning and inclusive research practice.

Theme C: Institutional frameworks and strategic implementation

Priority 5: Lead implementation of the Research Cultures Action Plan

We will lead and coordinate delivery of the University's Research Cultures Action Plan, working in partnership with colleagues across Schools, Colleges, professional services, researcher communities and senior academic leaders.

In 2026/27, we will:

- coordinate, monitor and report on delivery of the Research Cultures Action Plan, supported by the Research Cultures Delivery Group
- convene, support and grow the membership of the Research Cultures Forum
- issue our fourth Research Cultures Survey and use this data and other evidence to inform priorities and monitor progress
- work with Schools, Colleges and professional services to support local engagement and development of research culture priorities
- share examples of effective practice across the University
- share new resources, policies and processes with the University community including those produced by the InFrame research cultures project
- contribute to national and international conversations on research cultures

Intended outcomes
The Research Cultures Action Plan is delivered through coordinated, evidence-informed and partnership-based activity, supporting a more positive, inclusive and enabling research environment.



Schools, departments and teams are supported to identify and take action in their local priority areas.

Priority 6: Lead institutional implementation of the Researcher Development Concordat

We will continue to lead the University's implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. This work provides a framework for improving support, employment, career development and working environments for research staff.

In 2026/27, we will:

- convene and support the Concordat Implementation Group
- lead Concordat reporting and action planning
- convene a short-life working group on researcher career destinations to strengthen institutional understanding of researcher career pathways
- work with Schools, Colleges, professional services and researcher communities to support institutional progress
- use evidence and feedback to identify priorities and areas for improvement
- connect Concordat activity with wider work on research cultures, leadership, careers, sustainability, recognition and relevant staff support agendas
- support local and institutional actions that improve the experience and development of research staff
- play an active role in national and sector-level Concordat activity, sharing University practice, learning from other institutions and using sector intelligence to strengthen implementation at Edinburgh

Intended outcomes
The University continues to make demonstrable progress against its Concordat commitments, with clearer evidence of activity, impact and priorities for future improvement.

Theme D: Access, evidence and continuous improvement

Priority 7: Improve visibility, accessibility and digital provision

Following the launch of the new Researcher Development webpages, we will strengthen the visibility, accessibility and usability of our support. We will continue to develop digital resources that allow researchers and research leaders to access relevant information and development opportunities flexibly, regardless of discipline, location or working pattern.

In 2026/27, we will:

- maintain and develop the Researcher Development webpages
- develop and maintain the Research Staff Hub
- track usage and review open-access resources
- continue to develop self-paced learning and digital resources
- review engagement with Getting Started as a Postdoctoral Researcher at Edinburgh
- use webpage analytics and digital reporting tools to understand engagement and identify gaps
- strengthen communications through newsletters, webpages, emails, blogs, LinkedIn and targeted campaigns
- ensure resources and communications are accessible, inclusive and easy to navigate

Intended outcomes
Researchers and research leaders can more easily find and access relevant support, resources and opportunities, and the team has better evidence of digital reach, engagement, gaps and future development needs.

Priority 8: Use evidence, evaluation and partnerships to improve impact

We will use evaluation, feedback, data and partnership working to strengthen the quality, relevance and impact of our provision. This will support continuous improvement and help us evidence our contribution to institutional priorities.

In 2026/27, we will:

- continue systematic evaluation of workshops, events, consultations, coaching, mentoring and online resources
- use booking, attendance, no-show, feedback and engagement data to inform planning
- develop stronger evidence of reach, outcomes and impact across our main areas of work
- analyse engagement across Colleges, Schools and researcher groups where possible
- use evidence to inform Concordat reporting, Research Cultures Action Plan implementation and institutional reporting
- share practice and learn from sector developments in researcher development, research cultures, leadership and careers

Intended outcomes
Researcher Development provision is evidence-informed, responsive and continuously improving, with clearer evidence of reach, outcomes, impact and contribution to researcher growth, careers, leadership and positive research cultures.

7. Evidence, learning and improvement

We will use quantitative and qualitative evidence to assess progress, inform learning and support continuous improvement. This will include evidence of delivery, reach, outcomes and institutional contribution.

a. Delivery and reach

- delivery of planned priorities and activities
- participation in workshops, events, programmes and consultations
- engagement across Colleges, Schools and researcher groups
- uptake and use of online resources and webpages
- visibility, accessibility and reach of communications and digital resources

b. Researcher and research leader outcomes

- feedback from researchers, PIs, research leaders and partners
- evidence of increased confidence, skills, clarity, leadership capability or career preparedness
- evidence of improved mentoring, coaching, peer support, career planning or leadership practice
- examples of changed practice, decision-making or local action

c. Institutional learning and contribution

- progress against the Research Cultures Action Plan
- progress against the Concordat Action Plan
- evidence of improved visibility, accessibility and partnership working
- examples of effective practice, collaboration and institutional contribution
- evidence and insight that informs local and institutional priorities

Researcher Development

Web: research-office.ed.ac.uk/researcher-development

Email: researcher.development@ed.ac.uk