1. Overview
The University of Aberdeen received the HR Excellence in Research Award in December 2010 and retained it in 2012 and 2014. As a condition of our award we are required to undertake a six-year internal review against the principles set out in the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the detailed actions set out in our Concordat Implementation Plan. This progress report and accompanying action plan outlines our continued progress to date and our plans for the next 2 years.

In the last 2 years the University of Aberdeen has undergone a significant restructuring process that has seen changes to College and School structures, budget responsibilities and senior management appointments. As a result of these changes and in response to the University’s Strategic Plan 2015-2020, each school and professional services have developed operational plans in which many of the actions identify ways in which to support all staff including research staff in particular around career development.

Since 2014 we have made significant progress and can report a number of positive achievements including:

- Launch of institutional Strategic Plan 2015-2020 with commitment to supporting the development of staff and students
- Appointment of a Vice Principal for People Strategy with a remit to develop associated strategy and operational plan; many of the actions align with principles of the Concordat
- Launch and implementation of Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy with many actions identified that align with the principles of the Concordat
- Establishment of Employee Engagement Working Group and development of Employee Engagement Action Plan
- Establishment of Training and Professional Development Group to review, coordinate and share good practice around development support and opportunities for all staff
- EU funded project on Responsible Research and Innovation (NUCLEUS)
- Reviewed and improved recruitment and selection procedures
- Athena SWAN school self-assessment teams with research staff representatives as standard
- Review of Professional Services to ensure targeted, streamlined and efficient support for staff and students

2. Governance
Concordat implementation and the researcher development strategy is overseen by the new Vice-Principal for People Strategy and through reporting to appropriate committees, steering and working groups (Research Policy and Postgraduate Committees, Gender Equality Steering Group, Employee Engagement working group and the Training and Professional Development Group). This is beneficial as it broadens the reach of Researcher Development team and associated activities and provides multiple routes to engage with and receive feedback from the researcher community.

The University’s Research operational plan outlines how it supports implementation of the principles of the Concordat through provision of career development support for staff across the entire academic life-cycle from postgraduate student to senior researchers. It also identifies actions through which research active staff will be enabled to achieve their career ambitions, and how the institution can expand its research capacity and reputation.

3. The Review Process
3.1 How the Internal Review was Undertaken
Internal evaluation of the HR Excellence in Research action plan is now embedded within core practices. The Centre for Academic Development (CAD) had overall responsibility for the review process working closely with Human Resources (HR) and the Equality and Diversity team within. The progress was undertaken, in consultation with key stakeholders across the University (Public Engagement with Research, Research & Innovation, Careers Service, academic colleagues and research staff). For the six year review, we have assessed and evidenced progress against our 2014 action plan. The HR Excellence in Research Award forms part of a larger package of University strategies, operational and action plans which positively impact the career and professional development support and opportunities for our researchers. The HR Excellence in Research action plan is considered in the context of our institutional Athena Swan action plan, people strategy operational plan, employee engagement working group action plan and Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy.

The actions within the action plan have been agreed through the Research Policy Committee and VP for People Strategy through the Athena SWAN renewal, Employee engagement and Mental Health and Wellbeing processes.

3.2 How Researchers Views were Taken into Account
The views of researchers have been sought and incorporated in a number of ways including the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS) 2015 data, through research staff input via Athena Swan working groups and through continued networking with research staff in the Colleges and where possible with the Research Staff Association (RSA).
4. **Progress, Key Achievements and Future Actions**

At the beginning of the Concordat implementation process, the University undertook a gap analysis which informed the action plans for the periods 2010-12 and 2012-14. The initial action plan from 2010, 2012 internal review documents and 2014 external review documents are available here. Full details of progress are provided in the updated action plan document. A summary of highlights from the last two years is provided here:

### 4.1 Principles 1&2: Recruitment, Selection, Recognition & Value

The work on Principles 1&2 is situated within the wider institutional People Strategy with a focus on supporting individuals to reach their potential and to attract and retain ambitious staff and students to our international institution. The People Strategy and goals complement and support the other aspects of our Strategic Plan and our core activities. They do not stand in isolation from the strategies for Teaching and Learning, and Research and Knowledge Exchange, and the cross-cutting aims of Internationalisation, Digital Transformation, Public Engagement and Development.

- The University has introduced a system of Academic Line Management to ensure the effective general management of staff within a defined group within the University and the provision of academic leadership. The new system allows for bringing line management closer to individual researchers
- Employee Engagement Working Group was established with a remit to develop strategy and action plan to support working practices across the institution including induction, communications and recognition and value
- Introduction of an online recruitment process ensuring effective job descriptions and an open and transparent recruitment process
- Revised probation procedure to include research-only staff and allocation of mentors to all staff in probation to support objective setting and development goals. Formal probation review meetings at the intervals prescribed in the probation procedure (1, 3, 6, 9 and 11 months)

**2016-2018:** Review policies and practices relating to recruitment and selection; induction; annual review and promotions. This will include: enhancing online induction materials and support for line managers; improved support for recruiters and candidates through training and development modules; review promotions process and introduction of blind reviews of promotion applications; reward and recognition activities to be developed by recently appointed HR partner in this area; continued monitoring and review of annual review completion rates (100% by end 2017) and sharing of development needs across professional services.

### 4.2 Principles 3&4: Support and Career Development

The wider context for the work on Principles 3&4 is drawn from our institutional Strategic Plan 2015-2020 and companion strategies for People, Research and Knowledge Exchange, Athena SWAN and Teaching and Learning. The remit of the Strategic Plan includes creating an environment and culture where there is an expectation of research excellence and where researchers can thrive.

- An informal institution-wide Training and Professional Development Group was established in 2015 with a remit to share good practice and to collaborate to provide a comprehensive and coherent suite of development courses and opportunities for all University staff and postgraduate research students in a single and easily accessible place. The group has representation across the Professional Services that are involved in the provision of personal and professional development activities. The purpose of the group is to consolidate information relating to training and professional development support available across the University and to make it easier for individuals to find and to plan their activities. Data from CROS and PIRLS identified that this was a gap in awareness/knowledge particularly amongst our research-only staff. Through the TPD group we have created a dedicated Training and Professional Development webpage that provides information about opportunities and teams
- Centre for Academic Development (CAD) continues to provide a comprehensive open program of development opportunities for postgraduate researchers and research staff. Working in collaboration across professional services colleagues, the CAD has delivered and coordinated the delivery of nearly 300 courses/workshops and engaging with 1813 postgraduate students and 1247 members of staff (research only and academic) in 2015-2016
- Relaunched mentoring scheme (HR Staff Development May 2016) with dedicated mentor and mentee training sessions and tutorial videos. Over 165 staff have joined the scheme with 70 live partnerships. Guidelines and tutorial videos were made available online and dedicated training sessions for mentors and mentees (separate sessions) are delivered across the academic year (approximately 3 times each)
- Increased capacity within the Public Engagement with Research Unit (PERU) including a dedicated Life Sciences public engagement coordinator supported by the Wellcome Trust Institutional Strategic Support Fund, demonstrating commitment to a holistic approach to support for public engagement activity, while giving dedicated support for the research community working across University priority areas for medical and life science disciplines. This, together with continued partnership building, has allowed PERU to expand its range of tangible and real-life opportunities for researchers to put skills into practice through public engagement and to generate impact. Around 250 researchers have been involved in public engagement activity reaching a considerable external audience in 2016. The number of audience interactions recorded between July 2015
and July 2016 is 32,000 for the research-led events programme alone (175,000 for the University’s wider programme of public events)

2016-2018: Establish a ‘Grants Academy’ that will provide tailored support for research-only and academic staff; maintain provision of opportunities for research staff in line with their identified needs; sharing of good practice and coordinating activities through TPD group.

4.3 PRINCIPLE 5: RESEARCHER RESPONSIBILITY
The work on Principle 5 is situated within the wider institutional People Strategy, Athena SWAN action plan and the Employee engagement strategy that aims at building a sense of community among staff and improving feedback from staff.
• Enterprising Researchers project (EPSRC-funded) explores and addresses the links between researcher career aspirations, their employability and the skills valued by employers. This initiative provides mini-project scheme, which facilitates short-term collaborations between researchers and local businesses. To date, 10 researchers have successfully completed collaborative projects with local businesses
• Research-only (postdoc) representation on school level Athena SWAN self-assessment teams
• Closer working with schools to identify development needs arising through annual review
• Strengthened the link between Researcher Development and the Research Policy committee

2016-2018: Renew and reinvigorate working with the Research Staff Association including facilitating events and activities focused on researcher career development; relaunch of researcher-led initiatives enabling fund with intentions of a 5% increase in applications from research-only staff.

4.4 PRINCIPLE 6: EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY
The wider context for Principle 6 comes from leadership provided by the Vice Principal for People Strategy (with a remit for Equality and Diversity) and activities identified in institutional and school level Athena SWAN action plans and the institutional Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
• Institutional Bronze Award renewal 2015-2016
• School of Psychology and Natural and Computing Science Bronze Awards
• SFC Outcome Agreement further embeds equality and diversity into our activities

2016-2018: Deliver the action plans for People Strategy; Mental Health and Wellbeing; institutional Athena SWAN Bronze/Silver Award; school level Bronze/Silver Awards; review and update the University Equality Outcomes Action Plan; continue to support projects which support E&D such as the Senior Female Network and the Esslemont group.

4.5 PRINCIPLE 7: IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW
Implementation, evaluation and review are embedded within core business of teams working in and around these agendas e.g. HR Excellence, Athena SWAN, and Equality Outcomes. Progress against action plans will be reviewed by appropriate groups/committees in consultation with research staff, in particular through our re-engagement with the RSA.
• The overarching People Strategy is instrumental in embedding implementation and review to respond to the researcher community expectations

2016-2018: Continued commitment to running CROS and PIRLS in 2017 – 5% increase for CROS; continue to monitor and respond to researcher expectations; share good practice across internal and external networks.

5. SUCCESS INDICATORS
Progress will be measured against the actions set out in the action plan and monitored by appropriate working groups/committees. More broadly our success indicators will include:
• Achievement of relevant operational plan KPIs
• Evidence of progress/improvement in CROS and PIRLS data and other institutional surveys and review mechanisms – increase response rate by 5% especially for CROS
• Continued increased engagement with annual review (measured through internal measures and CROS/PIRLS) – 100% completion rate at each annual review cycle by 2018 and at least 75% of respondents citing increased value and usefulness of the process
• Development and delivery of professional development activities to support the ‘Grants Academy’ as it is established in 2017
• Renewal of Institutional Athena SWAN Bronze Award and on-going success at school level
• Improved engagement with Researcher-led initiative fund (upon re-launch), 5% increase in applications, in-particular from RS staff.

DECEMBER 2016