

CEDARS 2025 Report

Institutional report of the 2025 Culture, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers Survey (CEDARS)

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Executive summary

In 2025, the University of Aberdeen took part in CEDARS for the first time, establishing a baseline assessment of research culture and researcher development and enabling cautious benchmarking against the UK-wide dataset. The survey was completed by 339 respondents across Teaching and Research, Research-only and technical roles.

Overall, the results point to a research environment with a core of positive experience, particularly around supportive local research cultures, including strong inclusion and collaboration in immediate teams, and strong line management fundamentals, with high confidence in day-to-day management support for staff. Research integrity is also a clear strength, with respondents reporting high ethical standards and confidence in raising research practice concerns. Alongside these positives, clear pressures emerge that shape experience and sustainability: concerns about future job security are prominent, particularly for Early Career Researchers; support for mental health and wellbeing is not consistently experienced, particularly among Teaching and Research staff; and some report experiences of bullying/harassment or discrimination, with reporting patterns suggesting that formal routes are not consistently seen as accessible or effective. Recognition and valuing of contribution is not consistently experienced as translating into practical outcomes, particularly where it depends on workload allocation, clarity on what is valued across different types of contribution, and how progression is enabled. Professional and career development is supported by managerial encouragement and substantial training uptake, but many staff describe limited time and capacity for development, mixed experiences of induction and appraisal, and uneven support for career planning and development conversations, including for those on fixed-term or funding-dependent arrangements.

Benchmarking indicates that Aberdeen differs clearly from the sector in a small number of areas. The most notable opportunity is strengthening the breadth and consistency of career conversations, particularly encouragement to consider a wide range of future career options within and beyond academia, especially for technical staff and Mid-Career Researchers, alongside a locally acute concern around future job security. Many other themes – such as workload-linked recognition, perceived fairness of progression (particularly for Early Career Researchers), and sustaining wellbeing and psychological safety – appear to be shared sector-wide challenges, but remain priorities for local action.

About CEDARS

The [Culture, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers Survey](#) (CEDARS) is a UK sector-wide survey run by Vitae every two years. It provides insights into research culture and into the employment and development experiences of researchers across career stages.

National implementation of CEDARS

Across the UK, the survey was open to a wide range of roles within the research ecosystem. It ran from 1st March to 13th June 2025, receiving 13,334 responses from 53 institutions. Respondents included staff on Teaching and Research (64%), Research-only (27%), teaching-focussed (8%), professional services (8%), technical staff (4%), doctoral researchers (3%), and innovation/knowledge exchange/enterprise staff (1%). Two benchmark datasets are available: one including all respondents, and a second excluding doctoral researchers, technicians and professional services staff.

The Aberdeen implementation of CEDARS

In 2025, Aberdeen took part in CEDARS for the first time. This was a strategic decision in order to provide a baseline measurement and allow us institutionally and at the level of Schools and REF units of assessment to evidence progress in the 2027 survey in advance of our REF submission. Aberdeen CEDARS was run between 26th May and 13th June 2025 aligned with the timing of the national implementation of the survey, enabling access to national benchmarking.

CEDARS provides data for reporting against a number of culture and career development-related action plans, for example the Researcher Development Concordat, the Research Integrity Concordat, the Technician Commitment, and Athena SWAN. Taking part in CEDARS removes the need for a separate institutional survey on research culture, which would otherwise have been necessary for evidencing progress against these action plans.

Questions around culture have appeared in a number of recent surveys in the University including the 2024 staff survey, recent PGR surveys (PRES) and the Race Equality Charter Survey. Therefore, the strategic decision was made to focus CEDARS on those directly involved in research rather than on all possible staff groups. All staff on Teaching and Research contracts, Research only contracts or working in technical service roles were invited to take part in this survey. In this way, CEDARS provides evidence that complements that available from other institutional surveys. The primary purpose is to understand Aberdeen's local strengths, challenges and priorities; UK benchmarking provides useful context, but differences in the staff groups represented mean comparisons must be interpreted with caution.

About this report

This report summarises the University of Aberdeen’s results from the 2025 Culture, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers Survey (CEDARS). Its primary purpose is to support a clear understanding of Aberdeen’s local strengths, challenges and priorities in research culture and researcher development, establishing a baseline for institutional planning and future monitoring.

The report begins with an overview of the Aberdeen respondent sample. Findings are then presented across the three sections of CEDARS: **Recognition and Value**; **Professional and Career Development**; and **Environment and Culture**. For each section, the report brings together quantitative results and qualitative comments, grouped by sub-theme, with a focus on what these findings suggest about lived experiences of research culture at the University of Aberdeen. Following the detailed description of the findings in Aberdeen, each section identifies and discusses the key strengths and challenges emerging from the Aberdeen data.

National benchmark data are referenced briefly at the end of each section to provide sector context and to help identify areas where Aberdeen appears to differ most from the sector, as well as areas that reflect shared sector-wide challenges. This comparative lens adds value by helping to prioritise attention, test interpretation and situate Aberdeen’s results within wider patterns. However, benchmarking is not the main purpose of the report. In particular, comparisons must be interpreted with caution because the groups invited to take part at Aberdeen differ from those represented in national benchmark samples, and these differences may influence results.

Where challenges appear to be shared sector-wide, this does not reduce their importance for Aberdeen; it simply indicates that Aberdeen’s actions will sit alongside wider sector efforts.

About the respondents

The survey was completed by 339 individuals, representing 29% of those eligible and invited to complete it. 51% of respondents identified as men, with 41% identifying as women, 1% as non-binary and 7% preferring not to disclose this information. 25% identified as disabled, and 21% encountered barriers or limitations in day-to-day activities as a result of health conditions, physical, sensory or cognitive differences. 43% of respondents reported at least one caring responsibility.

In terms of employment, 81% of respondents were on open-ended contracts and 18% on fixed-term contracts. For those on fixed-term contracts, 33% have 1-2 years remaining, 34% have 2-4 years remaining, 14% report more than 4 years, and 18% have 12 months or less remaining. In terms of career stage, 31% were Early Career, 35% Mid-Career and 28% Senior Career.

The roles and engagement with research reflected our local strategy for targeting our implementation of CEDARS. Most respondents are Research and Teaching staff (61%) or Research-only staff (26%), with a further 11% identifying as technical staff; other staff groups each account for 1% or less. The vast majority (90%) report that they personally undertake research. Respondents often reported spending less time on research than allocated in their contracts. On a five-day week, this is evident as a downward shift from contracted to actual research time: the share reporting up to one day a week on research rose sharply (from 4% contracted to 23% actual), while those reporting around 1-2 days a week fell (from 41% contracted to 28% actual). There was also a drop among those spending around 4-5 days a week on research (from 25% contracted time to 20% actual). Overall, this suggests that a sizeable proportion are unable to spend as much time engaged in research as allocated in their contracts.

When asked about career aspirations and where they expect to be working in the future, 78% aspire to work in academic research and/or teaching roles, and 74% expect to do so. An aspiration–expectation gap is more evident for academic leadership: 21% aspire to leadership roles but only 14% expect to reach them.

Despite differences in the range of respondent roles taking part nationally and in Aberdeen, the Aberdeen respondent profile was broadly similar to the national benchmark in terms of personal characteristics, contract type and career stage. The main differences were that more men and fewer women took part in Aberdeen (51% men, 41% women) than nationally (44% men, 47% women), fewer respondents identified as disabled in Aberdeen (25%) than nationally (30%), and more respondents were at the Senior Career stage in Aberdeen (28%) than nationally (22%).

Recognition and value

Summary

Overall, the findings suggest that a large proportion of respondents experience recognition for their research and generally positive day-to-day management, but that this is not consistently linked to how work is allocated and how progression is enabled, and experiences can vary depending on local context and resourcing pressures. The key challenges relate to whether a wider range of contributions are valued and whether career advancement is experienced as fair and inclusive.

Detailed analysis

About two-thirds (63%) report that their research contributions are recognised by the institution. However, this recognition less frequently translates into workload and duties: 57% feel recognition is reflected in workload and duties, while 36% disagree. Respondents are most likely to feel valued for people-focused contributions, with 52% saying the institution values their role in supervising research students and 47% saying it values their contribution to developing or managing others; yet around a third do not feel valued in these areas (34% and 35% respectively). Views are more mixed for broader institutional contributions such as policy/decision-making and management/administration, where 36% and 38% feel valued, while 39% and 42% respectively feel these contributions are not valued. Overall, this suggests recognition is strongest for core research and supervision-related work, but less consistently felt where it depends on workload allocation and wider institutional service roles.

Promotion processes are seen as reasonably understandable by many respondents, with 58% saying that promotion pathways and processes are clear. However, 40% do not share this view, indicating that clarity is not consistent across the workforce. This concern was felt most strongly amongst Early Career Researchers, with 48% of ECRs indicating that they did not agree that promotion pathways and processes are clear, and 54% of ECRs on research-only contracts feeling this way. Perceptions of fairness and inclusivity in opportunities for career advancement raise concern about how equitably progression is experienced in practice: 45% feel opportunities are fair and inclusive, while 43% disagree.

Line management responsibilities are held by a substantial proportion of respondents in Aberdeen: 57% report at least some responsibility for managing staff (27% with formal line management/appraisal responsibilities, 16% managing staff without appraisal responsibility, and 14% managing informally). For those with line management responsibilities, confidence in being able to deliver key people-management processes is generally very high, including appraisal and feedback (93%), inclusive recruitment (95%), flexible working requests (88%), responding to health and wellbeing issues (88%), responding to bullying and harassment (83%), and supporting

staff in working towards their career aspirations (93%). The main exception is around providing guidance on redeployment processes, where confidence falls to 68%, pointing to a more variable and potentially less well-understood area of practice.

Views of immediate managers are broadly positive, particularly on the core elements of day-to-day management. Most respondents report that their manager clearly articulates expectations (80%), provides constructive and timely feedback (73%), supports them in carrying out their work (71%), and treats them fairly (71%). However, perceptions are weaker when the focus shifts from managing current work to enabling progression: 63% feel their manager supports their broader career aspirations and 59% feel they support them in working towards promotion. This suggests that while the fundamentals of line management are working well for many, there is less consistent support around career development and advancement.

Qualitative feedback highlights a mix of positive local practice and recurring concerns, and helps explain why experiences of recognition and value can differ across the institution. First, respondents describe recognition as meaningful where it is enacted through supportive team cultures and active line management, and some point to positive experiences of mentoring, advocacy and day-to-day support; however, many also describe a gap between being recognised in principle and having that recognition reflected in practical outcomes, particularly in how work is prioritised and resourced, and in the clarity of what is valued across different types of contribution. Second, many responses place recognition and management within a wider resource context: staff and managers describe commitment to supporting research and colleagues, yet emphasise that workload intensity, staffing constraints and reductions in support capacity limit what managers can do and can undermine feelings of being valued. Third, comments point to unevenness in experience depending on local context – such as differences between Schools, disciplines and research groups – and differences in line management arrangements and continuity; where management is consistent and advocacy is strong, it is described as making a significant difference, while where it is inconsistent it can heighten concerns about fairness, transparency and future prospects, including for those on fixed-term arrangements.

Strengths

Taken together, the results highlight several strengths to build on. Many staff report that their research contributions are recognised, immediate line management is rated positively on the core elements of managing day-to-day work, and those with management responsibilities express high confidence in delivering most people-management processes. This provides a strong platform for improvement that is less about basic managerial capability and more about how recognition and progression are experienced in practice.

Challenges

The clearest areas for improvement relate to two linked challenges: **ensuring recognition translates into practical outcomes, including workload credit**, and **strengthening transparency and perceived fairness in progression**. First, while respondents report that their contributions are recognised by the institution, they do not feel that this recognition translates into how work is allocated, indicating a need for clearer and more consistently applied workload approaches that translate contribution into protected time. Perceptions of institutional valuing also vary by activity, with weaker signals around wider institutional service and administrative contributions, indicating that these roles may be less visible and less reliably rewarded. Second, while progression processes are understood by many respondents, confidence that opportunities are fair and inclusive is not consistently high, and this concern is particularly evident at the Early Career stage; managerial support is also stronger for current performance than for progression. Qualitative feedback suggests that workload intensity, staffing constraints and reductions in support capacity, and variation in local line management arrangements and continuity, can shape how these issues are experienced in practice. Addressing these two key issues is likely to require clearer recognition criteria (including for service and leadership), more transparent and consistently applied progression processes, and stronger support and sponsorship for staff career development and advancement.

Benchmarking

UK benchmark data provide additional sector context for interpreting these findings and understanding Aberdeen's strengths and challenges. Aberdeen shows relative strengths compared to the benchmark in two areas: line managers report higher confidence in providing guidance on redeployment processes (68% in Aberdeen versus around 48% in the all-staff UK benchmark), and respondents are more likely to feel that supervising research students is valued (52% in Aberdeen versus around 43% in the all-staff benchmark). The two key challenges highlighted in this section of CEDARS – **ensuring recognition translates into practical outcomes, including workload allocation**, and **strengthening transparency and perceived fairness in progression** – do not appear to be unique to Aberdeen when viewed against benchmark patterns. However, they remain important priorities for local action and improvement in Aberdeen, given their implications for fairness, sustainability and confidence in career advancement.

Professional and career development

Summary

Overall, the findings suggest that professional and career development at Aberdeen is supported by strong managerial encouragement to develop, good awareness of institutional support, high engagement in appraisal, and substantial uptake of several training areas. However, there are clear pressure points around the time available for development, the effectiveness of appraisal for a significant proportion of staff, and limited support for career conversations, particularly encouragement to consider a wider range of career options.

Detailed analysis

In the current financial and sector context, the majority of respondents (81%) had not been recruited in the last two years. Among those appointed recently, induction is viewed positively overall, particularly at local level: 55% report that institution-level induction was useful/very useful, compared with 66% for departmental/faculty/unit induction. However, 29% report that institution-level induction was not useful and 16% report this for local induction; induction was not offered for 14-17% (depending on level), suggesting scope to improve both consistency of offer and the quality of experience.

Participation in annual appraisal/review is high (86%), and a majority of those who participated found it useful (61%). However, there is room for improvement. Among those who had not participated (49 individuals), the most common explanation is that they had not been invited (43%), indicating that gaps are not solely due to individual choice.

Day-to-day encouragement for development is a clear positive: 73% agree that their manager/supervisor encourages engagement in personal and career development activities, and 66% say they are aware of the support the institution provides. However, this does not consistently translate into a strong sense of direction and capacity. 51% report having a clear career development plan, and 50% feel they have time to develop their professional identity, while 39% and 43% respectively disagree. Mid-career researchers (MCRs) were the group that reported the lowest incidence of having a career plan: 45% agreement, compared to 55% for ECRs and 61% for senior career researchers (SCRs). MCRs were also the group that least felt they had time to develop their professional identity (44% agreement, vs 52% for ECRs and 61% for SCR). The weakest area is support to consider a wide range of future career options within and beyond academia: 31% agree their manager/supervisor encourages this, while 49% disagree. This was felt most strongly by technicians – 22% agreed while 61% disagreed that their line manager encouraged them to consider a wide range of future career options – and MCRs (21% agree, 61% disagree).

Training and development patterns suggest both strong engagement in some areas and clear demand in others. Uptake is highest for equality, diversity and inclusion (70%), research integrity (70%) and supervision (69%). In contrast, unmet demand is strongest for leadership (43% would like to, but have not engaged), project management (42%), managing others (41%) and communication and engagement (35%), indicating priorities where access, capacity or prioritisation may be limiting participation. Reported development time over the last year is concentrated in modest levels of activity: 44% report 1-4 development days, 18% report less than 1 day, and 29% report 5 days or more (with 9% not stated).

Qualitative feedback echoes the quantitative findings and adds detail on how professional and career development is experienced in practice. First, respondents describe a strong appetite for development and examples of good support, including managers who actively encourage learning and specific opportunities that are viewed as useful. They report engaging in a wide range of activity, including formal courses and online/self-paced learning (including mandatory modules), role- or career-stage programmes (e.g., early career and leadership development), workshops on supervision and research impact, coaching and informal mentoring, and external development through conferences and self-sourced training. However, many describe development as often being treated as ‘additional’ rather than planned and protected within everyday workload, making it hard to prioritise consistently. Second, the most consistent constraint is time and capacity: respondents frequently cite workload intensity, competing priorities and wider resourcing pressures, and some also note financial constraints limiting access to courses, conferences or other meaningful opportunities. Third, while training is valued where it is practical and directly relevant, many call for clearer signposting, describing difficulty finding opportunities or hearing about them too late to attend. They also call for more role-specific provision, with technical staff in particular highlighting limited relevant development, constrained funding for external training, and weak links between development and progression. More generally, comments favour provision that is tailored and directly applicable to role and career stage, with recurring priorities around leadership, project management, people management and communication/engagement. Finally, a number of responses link development to career structure and progression, suggesting training can feel less meaningful where pathways are unclear or advancement opportunities are constrained; a concern raised particularly strongly by technical staff. This is amplified for staff on fixed-term, low-hours or funding-dependent contracts, who report greater difficulty planning and investing in longer-term development and, in some cases, limited eligibility for opportunities.

Strengths

Taken together, the results point to a strong platform for professional and career development. Most staff report being encouraged to engage in development, awareness of institutional support is relatively high, participation in appraisal is

widespread, and there is substantial uptake of several core training areas. These strengths provide a foundation for shifting from “access and encouragement” toward a more consistently effective development experience, building on this positive day-to-day management support.

Challenges

The clearest areas for improvement relate to two linked challenges: **improving the consistency and impact of induction and appraisal**, and **strengthening career conversations**. First, the survey findings indicate that induction is not uniformly effective or consistently offered, appraisal is not consistently experienced as useful, and many staff report limited time to develop their professional identity or a lack of clarity in their development planning. Qualitative comments further indicate that development is often treated as something “additional” rather than planned and protected within everyday workload, and that time and capacity pressures – alongside financial constraints for some – can limit access to meaningful development opportunities. Training demand indicates clear priorities – particularly leadership, project management and people management – that may warrant a review of provision and clearer routes to access, including how these needs are identified and supported through induction and appraisal, alongside stronger alignment between development opportunities and progression pathways, including for staff on fixed-term or funding-dependent contracts.

Second, a key gap is the perceived uneven encouragement to explore a broader range of career options within and beyond academia, highlighting a need to strengthen the breadth and consistency of career conversations. This sits alongside evidence in the section on Recognition and Value that staff perceive weaker support from their line managers when conversations shift toward longer-term career progression (including broader career aspirations and working towards promotion), despite line managers themselves reporting high confidence in supporting career aspirations. Taken together, these findings highlight an apparent gap between managers’ confidence and staff experience, and indicate that there is a need to better support line managers with time, tools and signposting to enable meaningful, consistent career conversations that go beyond immediate role development to include longer-term aspirations and progression.

Benchmarking

The UK benchmarking provides some additional context for the strengths and challenges identified in Aberdeen. Aberdeen shows relative strengths compared to the benchmark in uptake of some training areas, particularly research integrity and supervision, with more respondents reporting that they have completed training in these areas than in both benchmark datasets. The clearest area where Aberdeen differs from the sector is around **career conversations**: Aberdeen respondents are much less likely to report that their manager/supervisor encourages them to consider a wide range

of future career options within and beyond academia (31% in Aberdeen versus around 62% in the all-staff benchmark). The other key challenge identified in this section of CEDARS – **improving the consistency and impact of induction and appraisal** – appears to reflect a wider sector challenge. Both of these challenges are important priorities for local action in Aberdeen, given their implications for career development, progression and longer-term sustainability.

Environment and culture

Summary

Overall, the findings suggest that the working environment and research culture at Aberdeen has a strong core of positive experiences – particularly around job satisfaction, inclusion, collaboration, and perceptions of ethical standards – with many respondents describing supportive local research cultures. However, there are clear pressure points around job security (particularly for Early Career Researchers), the extent to which the working environment supports mental health and wellbeing (especially for Teaching and Research staff), and experiences of bullying/harassment and discrimination alongside evidence that many incidents are not reported.

Detailed analysis

Many respondents describe a generally positive day-to-day experience. Job satisfaction is strong overall (71%), and most respondents feel included in their immediate research environment or group (76%). Perceptions are also positive around managerial support for work–life balance (69%) and institutional commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (73%). However, support for mental health and wellbeing is not consistently experienced: while 56% agree their working environment supports their mental health and wellbeing, 38% disagree, indicating a sizeable proportion experience the environment as unsupportive in this respect. This view did not differ substantially across career stages, but did vary between job roles, being expressed most strongly by those on Teaching and Research contracts (48% agree, 47% disagree).

Respondents report several positive features of research culture. Around two-thirds agree that different ideas and approaches to research are valued (67%), and three-quarters say creativity is welcomed (74%). Opportunities to collaborate are particularly strong (83%). Psychological safety is also positive overall, with 69% feeling able to voice ideas, concerns and questions without fear of repercussion or humiliation, but 26% disagree, indicating that the ability to speak up is not experienced consistently across groups. A notable contrast to these generally positive perceptions of culture is around feelings of future job security: only 31% feel their future at the institution is secure, while 60% disagree, highlighting a significant underlying concern about stability that sits alongside otherwise positive cultural indicators. This is felt most strongly amongst ECR staff on Research-only contracts, where only 14% agreed that they felt their future at Aberdeen is secure and 82% disagreed.

Requests for flexible working are relatively common (19%), while requests for maternity/paternity/adoption/parental leave (4%) and carers' leave (2%) are less frequently reported, with lower relevance for many respondents. Views on whether decisions are fair and inclusive tend to be more positive than negative among those

expressing an opinion – 52% agree this for flexible working, 41% for parental leave and 28% for carers’ leave – while outright disagreement is low (7%, 4% and 4% respectively). However, these items also show very high levels of uncertainty: 32-50% select “don’t know” and a further 9-18% “not applicable”, suggesting that many respondents do not feel able to judge fairness (often because they have not needed to use these processes), and that perceptions of fairness may not be strongly embedded or widely visible.

16% of respondents report witnessing or being subject to discrimination in the last two years, and 27% report witnessing or being subject to bullying or harassment. In both areas, reporting is relatively low compared with the level of experience indicated. For discrimination, 8% say they reported an incident and 15% say they did not report it, with most selecting not applicable (71%). For bullying/harassment, 11% say they reported and 18% say they did not report an incident, again with most selecting not applicable (62%). Taken together, the pattern suggests that where incidents occur, many are not formally reported, which has implications for institutional learning, support, and confidence in reporting routes.

Ethical standards and research integrity are clear areas of strength. Most respondents feel ethical standards are high in their research environment (85%), and a large majority feel able to raise concerns about research practice at the institution (77%). However, 10% report feeling pressured to compromise research standards or integrity, and 8% report witnessing research misconduct in the last two years. Only 3% say they have reported research misconduct, which may reflect low incidence, barriers to reporting, or both.

Awareness of sector-level frameworks is a clear area for improvement. For the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, 29% report some understanding and 41% say they have never heard of it. For the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, 30% report some understanding and 39% have never heard of it. Awareness is lower for HR Excellence in Research (16% some understanding; 54% never heard of it). Awareness of the Technician Commitment sits between these (24% some understanding; 47% never heard). This suggests that while the themes of these frameworks may be present in practice, the named commitments are not widely recognised by many respondents.

Qualitative feedback paints a picture of strong local research cultures for many respondents, often characterised by collegiality and collaboration, while also highlighting that respondents describe very different experiences depending on local context, with culture often framed as being shaped most strongly at the level of teams, research groups and Schools. A second recurring theme concerns the institutional environment shaped by senior leadership and governance: some respondents describe a perceived disconnect between senior management processes and what enables a healthy research culture, including concerns about communication, bureaucracy, and

whether staff voice is meaningfully heard. Third, many comments situate culture within wider pressures on capacity and security, noting that workload intensity, resourcing constraints and uncertainty can undermine wellbeing and make it harder to sustain positive working environments. Finally, respondents raise issues relating to psychological safety and confidence in reporting, with some describing experiences of bullying/harassment and concern about whether reporting routes feel safe and effective – particularly where power dynamics are perceived to be involved – alongside recognition that maintaining strong standards and integrity can be more challenging under sustained workload, resourcing and funding pressures.

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative responses indicate that experiences of culture vary substantially by local context, while institution-wide conditions and processes, such as senior leadership, governance and communication, also shape how culture is experienced.

Strengths

Taken together, the results point to a generally positive culture and environment for many staff. Respondents report strong job satisfaction and inclusion, a culture that supports collaboration, and broadly positive perceptions of creativity and valuing different approaches. Ethical standards and the ability to raise concerns about research practice are also reported very positively, indicating a strong foundation for responsible research culture.

Challenges

The clearest challenges relate to **job security** and to **sustaining wellbeing, psychological safety and confidence to report bullying/harassment or discrimination**. Job security emerges as a major concern, particularly for Early Career Researchers. Support for mental health and wellbeing is less consistently felt across the respondents, especially among Teaching and Research staff. Furthermore, while many feel able to speak up, a significant proportion do not, and there are reports of experiencing discrimination and bullying/harassment, with reporting rates suggesting that formal routes may not feel accessible or worthwhile for everyone, particularly where power dynamics are perceived to be involved. In addition to these two key challenges, awareness of key sector frameworks and commitments is uneven, which may limit their usefulness as shared reference points for expectations and improvement.

Benchmarking

With the caveats surrounding the different roles included in the Aberdeen and UK Benchmark datasets, Aberdeen shows relative strengths in research integrity culture and confidence to raise concerns about research practice: respondents are more likely to report that ethical standards are high in their research environment (85% versus around 80% in the all-staff benchmark) and that they feel able to raise concerns about

research practice (77% versus 69% in the all-staff benchmark). Aberdeen respondents also report greater awareness of the Technician Commitment (24% reporting some understanding versus 12% in the all-staff benchmark).

The clearest area where Aberdeen differs from the sector benchmark – and therefore a key priority locally – is **job security**. Aberdeen respondents are less likely to feel their future at the institution is secure (31% in Aberdeen versus around 39% in benchmark datasets), reinforcing job security as a particularly acute local pressure point. Moreover, the strongest concern is among Early Career Researchers on Research-only contracts (14% agree they feel secure; 82% disagree).

The second key challenge highlighted in this section – **sustaining wellbeing, psychological safety and confidence to report bullying/harassment or discrimination** – is not only a local priority for Aberdeen to address, but one that is also shared across the sector. For bullying/harassment and discrimination, both Aberdeen and the benchmark show a similar pattern: reported experience is higher than formal reporting. Witnessing or experiencing discrimination is reported at the same level in Aberdeen and the benchmark (16%), while bullying/harassment is higher in Aberdeen (27% vs 23% in the benchmark); in both cases, formal reporting remains low (Aberdeen: 8% for discrimination, 11% for bullying/harassment; benchmark: 7% and 10%). Wider sector evidence from Wellcome and the UKRI highlights persistent bullying/harassment and low confidence in speaking up in research environments, with factors such as hierarchy and insecurity contributing to under-reporting. This reinforces the need in Aberdeen to strengthen confidence in reporting routes and institutional response, alongside sustained action to support wellbeing and psychological safety – particularly for Teaching and Research staff – within a context of continuing sector-wide efforts.

Recommendations

The recommendations below draw directly from the University of Aberdeen's 2025 CEDARS findings. They focus on six priority areas that emerge consistently across the quantitative and qualitative responses, and are intended to support local action by building on strengths while addressing identified challenges.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen career conversations and career support

Strengthen the breadth and consistency of career conversations, particularly encouragement to consider a wide range of future career options within and beyond academia. This should include targeted attention for technical staff and Mid-Career Researchers, alongside practical support for line managers through time, tools and clear signposting to enable meaningful, consistent career conversations that go beyond immediate role development to longer-term aspirations and progression.

Recommendation 2: Improve feelings of job security in Aberdeen

Strengthen perceptions of stability and security by improving the clarity, consistency and timeliness of communication and support research careers, with particular attention to Early Career Researchers and staff on funding-dependent arrangements. Ensure staff and managers have clear guidance on available options, support routes and processes, including timely advice on next steps and redeployment where relevant.

Recommendation 3: Consider how recognition can translate into practical outcomes, including workload credit

Consider how workload approaches could better ensure that recognised contributions can be translated into protected time and realistic allocation, including for supervision, institutional service and leadership. Clarify how different types of contribution are valued and reflected in workload, reward and progression.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen transparency and perceived fairness in progression

Improve clarity and consistency in progression expectations and processes, and strengthen confidence that opportunities are fair and inclusive, particularly for Early Career Researchers. Strengthen support for progression planning so that support extends beyond current performance to longer-term development and advancement.

Recommendation 5: Improve the consistency and impact of induction and appraisal

Improve the consistency of induction offer and experience across local and institutional contexts, and strengthen the usefulness of appraisal through improved links to development planning, workload discussions and progression. Ensure clearer signposting to relevant development opportunities early in role and through annual appraisals.

Recommendation 6: Sustain wellbeing, psychological safety and confidence in reporting routes

Improve the extent to which the working environment supports mental health and wellbeing, particularly for Teaching and Research staff, and sustain progress on psychological safety and confidence to report bullying/harassment or discrimination. This should include continued focus on trust, accessibility and effectiveness of reporting routes and institutional response.

Next Steps

Governance and monitoring

The Research Cultures Oversight Group will consider the CEDARS findings and use them to prioritise and shape further activity under the Research Cultures Strategy across all six recommendation areas (Recommendations 1-6), liaising with relevant teams across the University involved in culture and development activity. Progress will be monitored through the Research Cultures Oversight Group, and CEDARS is intended to be repeated in 2027 to evidence change over time.

Activity already underway

Work is already underway through the Research Cultures Strategy to address many of these themes, particularly around career conversations and career support and development and progression (Recommendations 1 and 4). This includes annual Career Conversations events for Research Fellows and PGRs (running since 2024, with potential to extend to other career stages), a suite of leadership programmes delivered in 2025 for Principal Investigators, Early Career Researchers and Mid-Career Researchers, and the development of a Code of Practice for Researchers and their Managers (linked to the Researcher Development Concordat) alongside draft guidance for Principal Investigators to support the career development of Research Fellows.

Coordination with other evidence sources and action plans

These recommendations will also be shared with relevant local and institutional committees and groups leading research culture and development work. They will be used alongside existing action plans and initiatives responding to other University evidence sources, including the 2024 staff survey, PRES and the Race Equality Charter survey, and alongside Athena Swan action plans, to support coordination, avoid duplication and strengthen alignment of priorities across institutional activity.

Conclusion

Aberdeen's first participation in CEDARS provides a valuable baseline picture of a research environment with clear strengths to build on and a focused set of areas that should be prioritised for action. Respondents consistently describe supportive local research environments, with strong inclusion and collaboration within immediate teams. They also report strong line management fundamentals, with high confidence in day-to-day management support. Research integrity is a further clear strength, with high ethical standards and confidence in raising research practice concerns.

Alongside these strengths, the findings identify six priorities for action: strengthening career conversations and career support; improving feelings of job security; considering how recognition can translate into practical outcomes, including workload credit; strengthening transparency and perceived fairness in progression; improving the consistency and impact of induction and appraisal; and sustaining wellbeing, psychological safety and confidence in reporting routes.

The **Recommendations** and **Next steps** sections set out how these priorities will be taken forward, including through the Research Cultures Strategy, governance and monitoring arrangements, and coordination with wider institutional action planning. Repeat participation in CEDARS in 2027 will provide an opportunity to assess progress over time and evidence change against this baseline.



This report was prepared by the Research Cultures and Development Team

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