UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH LEAVE SCHEME**

The purpose of the institutional Leave Scheme is to enable staff time away from their core activity to undertake activities that will contribute to world-leading quality in research. This round of the institutional research leave scheme focuses on contributions to research culture, but applications will also be considered that will add significantly our submission to the next Research Excellence Framework by producing world-leading impact or outputs.

This round is open to staff who either undertake or enable or support research. This includes Research Fellows, Advanced Research Fellows, Technicians and colleagues in Professional Services roles.

**Applications for contributions to research culture**

Research culture encompasses a broad, holistic view of what constitutes a supportive research environment. It places researchers’ experiences, development, and support at the forefront, emphasising that the culture in which research takes place is just as important as the research outcomes themselves. This focus on researcher development and support is accompanied by an emphasis on [research integrity](https://ukrio.org/) and [reproducibility](https://www.ukrn.org/), [Open Research](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/support/open-research.php) approaches, and [robust and responsible research assessment](https://sfdora.org/) techniques, all of which shape the culture and environment that researchers work within.

We envision our research culture at the University of Aberdeen as a community that brings together the diverse, vibrant research cultures already thriving within our Schools, disciplines, and partnerships. Our institutional strategy centres around a collaborative approach that promotes effective ways of working to enhance collegiality, professional growth, and ethical standards. These ways of working help to provide the conditions and systems to enable people to conduct excellent research that will help deliver our Aberdeen 2040 research aims.

We invite applications that support local research cultures within Schools and units and those that focus on research culture across the University. We encourage applications that improve research culture by enhancing one of the following four ways of working:

* [**Shared Standards of Excellence**](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/research/support/shared-standards-of-excellence-1982.php)

Guided by integrity, transparency, and openness, our shared standards ensure ethical, accessible research, fostering mutual trust, respect, and accountability across all levels.

* [**Collective problem solving and sharing good practice**](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/research/support/collective-problem-solving-and-sharing-good-practice-1987.php)

Focused on sharing best practices across Schools, our approach fosters collaboration to address common challenges and boundaries to strengthen our research culture.

* [**Recognising contributions and supporting career development**](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/research/support/recognising-contributions-and-supporting-career-development-1992.php)

Acknowledging diverse contributions, our approach fosters career growth and inclusive leadership through development, reward and recognition.

* [**Developing an evidence-informed approach to culture change**](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/research/support/developing-an-evidenceinformed-approach-to-culture-change-1997.php)

Guided by evaluation strategies to assess engagement with, and impact of, our approach enables continuous improvement through data-driven insights.

Research culture can be enhanced through any initiatives that support these ways of working in the University, such as developing and implementing a policy, establishing a network to support an aspect of research or staff development, initiatives that improve our ability to collaborate effectively in the University and beyond, procedures to ensure inclusivity in our research activities, and ways of recognising diverse contributions to research. Projects considering equity, diversity and inclusion in research culture are encouraged to take an intersectional approach.

In all cases, projects should be evidence-led: using evidence-informed decision making to identify the need for the project and developing evaluation strategies for assessing the impact of the project. Projects that develop new evaluation strategies that may be transferrable to other activities are also encouraged.

We encourage applications from teams as well as those from individuals. For team-based applications, funds can be requested to cover the leave of one individual in the team, explaining the benefit to the team as a whole, or can be used to cover other expenses that allow the team time away from usual duties in order to progress the project.

Proposed activities must clearly demonstrate how they add to the vitality of our research culture in the University, fostering a thriving, inclusive and engaged culture. Applicants must also consider the sustainability of their proposed work. Specifically, how there will be ongoing and lasting benefit to the University’s research culture as a result of this project.

In particular, we welcome applications that detail how they are likely to also contribute to our submission to the People, Culture and Environment element of REF2029. The People, Culture and Environment element of REF 2029 replaces the Environment element of previous REF exercises. This new element of the REF has been broadened in scope to allow an assessment that better recognises and rewards institutions and units of assessment for progress in research culture. The importance of research culture in the sector is reflected not only in the introduction of this new element of the REF but also by its weighting in the assessment: While the Environment element of REF2021 was 15% of the overall REF assessment, People, Culture and Environment will be 25% of the REF2029 assessment.

**Applications for contributions to engagement and Impact**

We welcome proposals that will support and enhance ongoing impact work that will produce impact case studies for REF2029 that meet world leading (4\*) standard.

**Applications for contributions to knowledge and understanding**

We welcome proposals that will ensure the completion of ongoing research of world leading (4\*) standard, e.g., undertaking additional work to further strengthen the quality of ongoing work; completion of longer term projects to ensure publication falls within the current assessment exercise.

**When can you apply?**

Applications are invited by **4pm on 24th January 2025**; selection decisions will be made by the end of February; it is anticipated that successful candidates will be notified by mid-March 2025. Research leave under this round of the scheme will normally fall into the first half session of the academic year 2025/26 (however, if necessary, applications can be made for the second half session of the 2025/26 academic year). Awards will be up to £20k for teaching or other buy out and reasonable expenses. Awards are payable to the School.

All candidates will require support from their Head of School or Professional Services Directorate and, where appropriate, will need to comply with any additional School requirements around approval.

This Research Leave Scheme is governed by the institutional [Research Leave Policy](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/policy-zone-research-and-knowledge-exchange/Research_Leave_Policy.pdf).

**Who can apply?**

The scheme is open to staff across all career stages who either undertake or enable or support research. This includes Research Fellows, Advanced Research Fellows, Technicians and colleagues in Professional Services roles.

**What can staff apply for?**

The awards can include (to a maximum of £20k)

* Cost of replacement teaching for up to a semester (costed at teaching fellow)
* Cost of replacement administrative or technical duties for a semester
* Networking/travel/access and/or resource (e.g., expert advice) costs associated with proposed activities

Applications should be submitted fully costed – please consult with Research Finance. If you do not have access to Worktribe, please contact RAMSProject@abdn.ac.uk.

**Selection panels**

The selection panels will meet thereafter to consider applications and make selections. Applicants can request feedback on their applications; however, appeals can only be made on the grounds of process.

The selection panel will be chaired by the Vice-Principal (Research) and draw on a pool of panelists that includes the Research Deans, Interdisciplinary Directors, School Directors of Research (disciplinary expertise will be co-opted as required), and Professional Services leads for Research Culture, Commercialisation, Impact and REF2029. Each panel will consist of at least 3 panelists. Administrative support will be provided by the Directorate of Research & Innovation.

The decision of the panel is final. The panel reserves the right not to award leave if, in their view, applications fail to achieve the scheme’s objectives or the scheme is over-subscribed.

**What information will the selection panel require?**

The application should set out how the proposed activities during the research leave period enable the applicant(s) to enhance our research culture in the University, and/or to complete or strengthen research to a [world leading](https://www.ref.ac.uk/guidance-on-results/guidance-on-ref-2021-results/#2021) level (i.e. 4\*) for REF2029.Applications should also articulate how proposed activities contribute to the aims of the Aberdeen 2040 strategy.

The application should set out clearly how leave at this point will support, strengthen or enhance aspects of our research culture within the timetable for REF2029. Applications focused on impact or outputs should clarify how the leave will deliver one or more 4\* research outputs; or one or more 4\* impact case studies for REF2029.

Any previous external or internal funding, and further funding that may be required should be clearly listed, even if the proposed spend does not fall under allowable costs within this scheme. **Applicants may ask for funding for leave of up to a maximum six months.** Any leave granted under this scheme may be supplemented by externally funded leave, or research leave granted under a School scheme.

Applicants are required to report the outcomes of the leave, within one month of completion and further reporting beyond that date.

Please note, all applications must clearly outline how existing research responsibilities including PhD supervision will be maintained. If you are in a funded research only role, your funded research must continue, but requested funding can be used to provide full or partial capacity to support research activities or your proposed culture project.

**What are the selection criteria?**

Selection panels will consider:

* whether the proposed activity or activities are capable of achieving measurable change in our research culture, improving the vitality of our research culture and, where appropriate, enhancing our REF submissions.
* whether the benefits of the proposed work are sustainable beyond the period of leave
* in the case of applications for impact and outputs, whether the proposed activities are capable of achieving world leading (4\*) quality in terms of originality, significance and rigour (for research outputs) or in terms of reach and significance (for impacts)
* whether the timeframe for delivery is realistic and achievable for REF2029

**Equality & Diversity**

We will be undertaking equality impact assessments to monitor the representation of researchers with characteristics protected by the Equalities Act 2010, full time/part time status and career stage among applicants and awardees. While the selection criteria will apply equally to all applications, **we particularly invite applications from underrepresented groups, those with protected characteristics and/or at early career stages.**

In considering applications, allowance will be made for researchers/colleagues who have taken a career break or family related leave, are returning from long absence or whose research has been hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Further information**

Further information is available from Ben Tatler (b.w.tatler@abdn.ac.uk), Dean for Research Culture.