

University of Hertfordshire 12-Year HR Excellence in Research Award Report

Context of Institution

At the University of Hertfordshire, our target audience for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers is our researcher community, which is all staff and students who do research. This includes staff with research as the primary or secondary aspect of their role: 134 on research contracts (research-only staff), 1245 academics with research and scholarship contracts (only a proportion of these staff are research-active), and 'hidden researchers', combining research with other roles for example professional support and technical staff. In total there are about 680 staff who identify as research-active, and of these our priority group are research-only staff. All staff with research as part of their role were invited to complete Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS).

Governance Structure

The structure for delivering on the Concordat, in terms of institutional responsibilities and committees at the University, centres on our Researcher Development Group (RDG). Its Terms of Reference are to promote researcher development issues at the University and to coordinate the University's reviews for the HR Excellence in Research award and for compliance with the sector-owned Researcher Development Concordat. The RDG has access to and support from high level committees, with the RDG Chair reporting termly to the University's Research Committee chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise) (PVCR) where Researcher Development is the first standing item on the agenda after Research Policy and Strategy, which allows for good consideration of researcher development issues with the PVCR, Associate Deans (Research) (ADRs) and other senior managers from central departments supporting research. The RDG Chair also sits on the People Board, chaired by the Secretary and Registrar, which delivers the People strand of the University's Strategic Plan, bringing the voice of researchers to this committee.

The RDG represents and informs researchers across the University through its structure, membership, termly meetings and activities. It is chaired by a senior academic working with an HREiR Project Manager from Learning and Organisational Development (L&OD). We have at least one Early Career Researcher (ECR) School Representative from each of our 7 academic Schools (including research-only staff) to provide two-way communication across the University. Additional RDG members represent central departments: the Research Office (RO); Careers & Employment; the Doctoral College; HR; the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Office; Enterprise and Business Development; the Learning & Teaching Innovation Centre; Health, Safety and Wellbeing (HSW); ADRs and the University and College Union. RDG agendas and minutes are circulated to the PVCR; Director of the Doctoral College, Director of HSW, Head of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI), the ADRs in the 7 Schools, the Head of HR and the Head of L&OD. Hertfordshire has 6 Research Themes addressing global challenges which span the University's research areas and the Theme Champions are part of the RDG circulation group. The RDG enables us to have a researcher-led culture within the University, of which we are proud.

Internal Evaluation

Our HREiR Action Plan is kept live with continuous review at the RDG meetings and reporting to the Research Committee (both termly). RDG School representatives communicate to and from the Schools on actions, through the researcher group and the ECR group within the school (where applicable) and through school mailing lists to ensure all academics and research-only staff are kept informed, and are able to contribute their views on matters concerning researcher development. Two-way communication with other relevant central departments is provided by the other RDG members. For this HREiR 12-year review, as previously, we have consulted our RDG School representatives, and used the feedback they have gathered from researchers in their Schools, audited progress against the current action plan and identified new actions. We have integrated researchers' views from other sources including the

high-level results from CEDARS, the well-attended bi-monthly online Research Q&A held by the PVCRC (usually between 90-120 staff), the staff survey and feedback from events run for researchers. 130 staff responded to CEDARS, of which 30 were research-only staff. This is 38% of the staff who were entered for REF2021. The data we extracted for the action plan refers to research-only staff (our priority group). We have looked at the data from the academics alongside the research-only staff and responded in our new action plan where there was a large mismatch around academics' workload. We have aligned our action planning with those for Athena SWAN; the Race Equality Charter Mark; the Knowledge Exchange Concordat and the Research Integrity Concordat. The newly updated action plan for 2021 & 2022, the new action plan for the three years of 2023-2025, inclusive, (both on the new Vitae template) and this report were prepared by the RDG Chair, who is herself a researcher, and the HREiR Project Manager, and presented to the RDG, Research Committee and the Central Executive Group. Thus, the 12-year review has involved researchers' views at every stage.

Our Research Strategy 2020-2025 aims to support researchers at every stage of their development with time and resource to create a sustainable community of learning, thought and knowledge. We are seeking to continuously enhance the research culture. In 2020 and 2021 highlighted impacts of these developments on the environment and culture, employment and professional and career development are recorded below:

Environment and Culture

Wellbeing and mental health

The University's Health and Wellbeing Key Performance Indicator (KPI) - to increase the percentage of staff participating in wellbeing programmes including Active Staff to 50% - was achieved with at least 49% of research-only staff participating (1/3rd participants did not register). The promotion of good mental health and wellbeing through support to researchers and their managers was a focus in 2021, a year which included disruption to the work of many researchers. This included a keynote on mental health and wellbeing of researchers by Rachel Cox from Vitae; new Researcher Development Programme sessions promoted to ECRs including an emphasis on wellbeing; a monthly Validium (the University's Employee Assistance Programme service) newsletter and information sheet from HSW featuring wellbeing support for researchers and research managers; and a new Wellbeing Page for staff on HertsHub which has been well promoted by HSW. Validium has been well signposted regularly to all staff through bimonthly staff wellbeing updates. The 'Support for Managers and Academics' session about support available to managers and their teams/students, covering resources for dealing with challenging situations involving their staff or students was hosted by HSW and Validium. The range of support was well received by researchers and their managers. 67% of researchers completing CEDARS agreed or strongly agree that their working environment supports their mental health and wellbeing. 78% of managers felt confident to respond to any issues relating to health and wellbeing. 78% of researchers agreed or strongly agreed that their manager promoted a good work life balance. 82% UH respondents have a good level of job satisfaction (compared to 72% nationally).

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Part of the Research Strategy 2020-2025 is to develop a diverse community of research engaged staff, students and innovators. Working towards this, the EDI board was established which reports EDI data quarterly. Attendance at mandatory EDI training for all staff, including researchers, has improved significantly to 93%. There is a strong partnership between the Equality Office and L&OD in the delivery of EDI related development sessions. An EDI for managers workshop has been introduced to clarify management responsibility. A wide range of protected characteristics are being covered by EDI training, including disability, race, sexual orientation and more general EDI awareness. The evaluations and feedback comments are very good and show a high standard of delivery and knowledge from the facilitators. 78% of respondents completing CEDARS believe UH is committed to EDI. 65% of respondents believe they are treated fairly irrespective of their protected characteristics, which reflects feedback from RDG.

HR have completed the review of policies to ensure they are inclusive, equitable and transparent. Fifteen policies have been reviewed with Equality Impact Assessments conducted on all.

Bullying and harassment

Bullying and Harassment Investigators have been recruited and trained as a voluntary role, providing more staff with knowledge and skills as well as peers that can be approached regarding bullying and harassment incidents. There is now an anonymous new channel to report at UH Staff Speak Out.

Researchers' voice and policy development

ECRs and ADRs contributed directly to the Institutional Learning Needs Analysis, to ensure that researchers voice will be used to inform the long-term planning of development opportunities. The addition of an ADR to the RDG has enabled the voice of research managers to inform provision. There has been more transparency between ADRs and RDG as 2 other ADRs were involved with alongside ECRs managing the RDG Skill-Up! 2022 funding (see below).

The PVCR is very accessible to staff at all levels and regularly holds Research Q&A to whole UH online, which have been well attended (+100 staff), where researchers and managers of researchers are able to share their views. There is close communication between the PVCR, RO, EDI Office, HSW and others involved in policy making through the RDG and Research Committee where researchers and research managers are represented.

Employment

Recruitment and induction, recognition, reward and promotion

Working to develop a diverse community of research engaged staff, students and innovators, there were at least 91% UH respondents believe recruitment is fair; inclusive; transparent and merit based. 100% UH respondents were offered an induction, which now features input on researching at UH and support for researchers. Since the introduction of specific workshops on progression for female applicants and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic applicants led by the Deputy Vice Chancellor in both years there has been an increase in the diversity in promotions to Reader, Associate Professor and Professor, there has been a 5.7% increase in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff at Grades UH09 and above to 17% (exceeding the KPI for 2025) and 6.5% increase in Senior Academic Women at Grades AM1 and above to 45% (towards the KPI for 2025 of a 10% increase).

People Management

To support researchers at every stage of their development, good management is vital, so the content and delivery of all mandatory training workshops for line managers were reviewed in 2021 and run regularly including The Manager's Role in Referring and Reasonable Adjustments; Racial Justice; Challenging Conversations; Recruitment & Selection Compliance Essentials; Appraisal & Successful People Management; Recruitment & Selection training. Our research managers are at similar levels of confidence to national levels in dealing with those they appraise - but are more confident than the national level for dealing with poor performance. Less managers at UH than nationally, would like more training in managing staff performance or conducting appraisals, most likely because they have received the training they need. This is likely to improve further on roll out of refresher training.

Professional and Career Development

Championing professional development

Part of our Research Strategy is to extend and enhance our successful researcher development programme to support all research-engaged staff. An expanded programme and Spring and Summer Schools have run with increased attendance and good evaluations. A highlight of 2021 was the successful and well-attended online #UHResDev21 Conference, organised by the RDG. This included a creative career development workshop with time for self-reflection as well as highlighting careers

resources. It ran twice and was well attended and received. There is a new careers website which includes a section with support for those completing research and considering their next steps with many useful links.

26% of our respondents manage to take their 10 days CPD. Whilst higher than the national figure (14%) there is still a need to draw researchers' attention to opportunities that are available, and to recognise a wider range of professional development activities. There has been increased promotion of training, mentoring and events relevant to researchers' development through regular RO Newsletter and Staff Updates since the CEDARS was carried out. 2 members of RDG attended in the Vitae Conference 2022 and the Vitae workshop on using your CEDARS results; 1 attended a Ten is Zen; 1 attended member forum on HREiR Award; 1 attended the Festive Networking event. In this way five members of the RDG have benefitted from the input from Vitae and have shared with colleagues and researchers through the RDG and RC. The input has been much valued and has impacted the way that we have worked.

Mentoring

There are mentoring schemes within Schools and cross-school mentoring schemes are open to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic researchers and women researchers through staff networking groups. Mentoring and coaching opportunities are featured on a dedicated HertsHub site to ensure transparency, so staff can identify the mentoring scheme that will best suit their needs.

Recognition

To recognise, support and reward staff and students to conduct innovative research, actions have increased the nominations for the Vice-Chancellor's Award (VCA) for research by 100% in 2022, with three awards made and others highly commended. The criteria for Researcher of the Year in the 2022 VCA awards were reviewed and broadened, enabling more recognition of the work of researchers at UH.

Skill-up and Leadership training

We are working to increase transparency around, and opportunities for staff to input into, decision-making. In 2022 we were delighted to be able to re-launch Skill-Up! funding for researcher development, led by the researchers in the RDG who administered the bidding process and evaluated the Skill-up! bids and decide distribution of funding. 23 researchers benefitted from Skill-Up! 2022 funding directly for personalised development opportunities. School representatives benefitted from their role in managing the Skill-up! 2022 funding. Additionally, 5 researchers were funded to attend the Advance HE research leadership programme. A UH manager leadership programme has been piloted, and the Advance HE programmes Aurora (for women leadership) and Diversifying Leadership have restarted after a 2-year gap. The CEDARS results indicate a high level of desire to have leadership, project management, management and interdisciplinary research training which will be taken into consideration in the planning of future development events by L&OD.

Enterprise and Research Impact

Our Research Strategy 2020-2025 aims to encourage research outcomes that are impactful, accessible and widely communicated. The research culture has been enhanced in 2022 through well received enterprise training and development programme and series of workshops and resources on 'Communicating research: Learning how to use innovative formats for reach and influence', and research impact workshops.

Next steps and the focus of the strategy for the next three years, including success measures.

Environment and Culture

The Concordat Strategy (from Open Herts Culture Review recommendations) is to empower researchers to express their views; engage with senior leaders; input into decision-making; and be aware of relevant staff networks. To facilitate this, there will be 2 ECR representatives belonging to the RDG, one a research fellow, on the Research Committee, with a standing item on the agenda. They will have access to researchers from across the institution through the RDG and other forums. The new Director of Research Culture and Environment will join the RDG and the PVCR will be invited, annually to share concerns, achievements and put forward suggestions. Researchers will explore interest in setting up a cross-university RSA or ECR network. Feedback on impact of these actions will be from ECR representatives through the RDG, staff networks, staff survey and focus groups indicating researchers and their managers can contribute to decision-making and express their views, increase (27% - 40%) of all researchers and their managers agree that their contribution to institutional decision-making is valued (CEDARS), and increase (38% - 60%) of researchers think it is safe to speak up and challenge the way things are done in the University (staff survey). The Concordat Strategy (from UH Research Strategy) is to develop a diverse community of research engaged staff, students and innovators, recognising and supporting talent (from any background, trajectory, part time/full time etc.). To facilitate this, EDI best-practice principles will be incorporated into our expression of interest process, ensuring compliance with funders' policies and best practice. The process is being piloted for UKRI's Future Leader Fellowships scheme. The process will be reviewed after bid submission. Evidence of progress will be the involvement of staff networks and RDG to help formulate this policy, and their positive feedback on the process.

Employment

To facilitate development of a diverse community of research engaged staff and innovators, the recruitment and selection processes will be reviewed to embed the breadth of EDI principles throughout. Additionally, we will recognise, support and reward staff to conduct innovative research and to develop new products and services through the introduction of an enterprise academic pathway, for any researchers toward Associate Professor Entrepreneur, to develop this talent across the university. Evidence of progress will be increasing BAME UH9 and above to 16%; female staff at AM1 and above by 10%; and an increase in BAME research fellows to 25%. To ensure excellent people management is embedded in institutional culture, through workload allocation, the Director of the Doctoral College will engage with the academic workload project to advocate on behalf of research-active academics. Evidence of progress will be an increase from 36% - 60% of academics agreeing they are being treated fairly in relation to workload (CEDARS) and research fellows being able to manage my current workload increase from 69% - 80% (staff survey).

Professional and Career Development

The Concordat Strategy (from UH Research Strategy) is to support researchers at every stage of their development with time and resource to create a sustainable community of learning and knowledge. To broaden appreciation around the nature and availability of effective professional development, and the uptake of opportunities, available opportunities will be showcased through Research Office News; researchers CPD guide on HertsHub; and development of careers website enabled by employing ECRs as career coaches. The profile of mentoring and coaching opportunities will be raised and work will take place with researcher managers to increase awareness of careers provision. The target is to increase the number of researchers spending 5+ days on training and other CPD activities (30% - 50% CEDARS); an increase in researchers' awareness of support provided for career and professional development (54% - 70% CEDARS). 10% increase in number of researchers applying for external funding and 10% increase in engagement with Research Professional. Feedback will be used to inform the on-going quality and appropriateness of opportunities provided by the departments responsible.