

## University of Hertfordshire 11-Year HR Excellence in Research Report

### Constituency and Structure

At the University of Hertfordshire (UH), 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 part of their role: 137 on research contracts, 1112 academics with research and scholarship contracts (only a proportion of these staff are research-active), and 'hidden researchers', combining research with other roles. All staff with research as part of their role were invited to complete the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS).

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 Vitae Concordat. The RDG has access to and support from high level committees, with the RDG Chair reporting termly to the University's Research Committee (RC) chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise); and sitting on the People Board, chaired by the Secretary and Registrar, which delivers the People strand of the University's Strategic Plan.

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 an early career researcher School Representative from each of our 8 academic Schools 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 Office (EO); the Athena SWAN Project Officer; the Learning & Teaching Innovation Centre; Health, Safety and Wellbeing (HSW); Associate Deans Research (ADRs) and the University and College Union. RDG agendas and minutes are circulated to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise); Director of the Doctoral College, Director of HSW, Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), the ADRs in the 8 Schools, the Head of HR and the Head of L&OD. The University has 6 top level Research Themes addressing global challenges which span the University's research areas and the Theme Champions are part of the RDG circulation group.

### Review Process

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 and two way communication with other relevant central departments is provided by the other RDG members. For this HREiR 11-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. We have aligned our action planning with those for Athena SWAN; the Race Equality Charter Mark and the Research Integrity Concordat. The updated 10-year action plan for 2021 and 2022 and report were prepared by the RDG Chair, who is a researcher, and the HREiR Project Manager, and presented to members of the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Enterprise)'s Management Group (PRMG). Thus, the 11-year review has involved researchers' views at every stage.

### Key Achievements

- 82% UH respondents have a good level of job satisfaction (compared to 72% nationally)
- Very successful and well-attended online #UHResDev21 Conference
- Promotion of good mental health and wellbeing through support to researchers and their managers
- 93% UH staff have undertaken the well evaluated EDI training

- 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
- Mentoring and coaching opportunities for researchers are featured on dedicated HertsHub site
- Leadership programmes are restarting after a 2-year gap
- Increased promotion of training, mentoring and events relevant to researchers' development through the regular Research Themes and Research Office Newsletter and Staff Updates.

## **Environment and Culture**

Wellbeing has been a focus of our strategy in 2021, a year which has included disruption to the work of many researchers. This has included a keynote on mental health and wellbeing of researchers by Rachel Cox from Vitae; new University Researcher Development Programme sessions promoted to early career researchers including an emphasis on wellbeing; a monthly Validium (the provider for 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 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Board is established and 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 EO 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 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 completing CEDARS 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. Some 15 Policies have been reviewed with Equality Impact Audits conducted on all. Bullying and Harassment Investigators are being recruited as a voluntary role that staff will be trained to undertake, 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.

## **Employment**

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 BAME applicants led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, there has been a 4.7% increase in BAME staff at Grades UH09 and above to 17% (exceeding the KPI for 2025) and 2.3% increase in Senior Academic Women at Grades AM1 and above to 45% (towards the KPI of 10% increase).

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise) is very accessible to staff at all levels and regularly holds online Research staff update Q&As to the whole of the University, which have been extremely well attended with 100 plus staff at each meeting, where researchers and managers of researchers are able to share their views. There is close communication between the Pro Vice-Chancellor, RO, Equality Office, EO, HSW and others involved in policy making through the RDG and Research Committee where researchers and research managers are represented.

The content and delivery of all mandatory training workshops for line managers have been reviewed this year 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. Fewer managers at the University 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**

The highlight was a creative career development workshop at #UHResDev21 with the amazing Dr Suzanne Culshaw, which included time for self-reflection as well as highlighting careers resources. It ran twice and was well attended and received. There is a new website <https://herts.ac.uk/careers> which includes a section with support for those completing research and considering their next steps with lots of useful links.

The nominations for the Vice-Chancellor's Award for research have increased by 63% in 2021, but still just recognising the research success of 7 individuals.

Some 26% of our respondents manage to take their 10 days Continuing Professional Development allocation. 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. Two members of RDG attended the Vitae workshop on using our CEDARS results; one attended a member forum on the HREiR Award; one is to attend the Festive Networking event.

There are mentoring schemes within Schools and cross-school mentoring schemes are open to BAME 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.

A manager leadership programme is being 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.

## **Next steps and the focus of the strategy for the next year, including success measures**

Relevant aspects of the CEDARS feedback will be shared with researchers by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise) in a high-profile Research staff Q&A session. As the granular data is processed meetings will be held with relevant professional Strategic Business Units (e.g. EO, HSW, RO, HR), with committees and management groups (e.g. Research Committee, Pro-Vice Chancellor Research Management Group) and with groups representing researchers (e.g. RDG, the Doctoral College and various approved networking groups) to inform actions going forward and to raise the profile of CEDARS through 'You said... We did...' messages, to help researchers understand how the survey data is used and to encourage more participation in future CEDARS. (10% rise in researchers completing next CEDARS).

Early career researcher attendance at RDG will be more actively encouraged by the Chair making contact with those who are unable to attend a meeting, to enable them to share views from their Schools and enabling researcher views to directly inform the Institutional Learning Needs Analysis. (all 8 early career researchers to be invited to contribute feed forward from their Schools).

The section of the careers website for those completing research and considering their next steps will be expanded and we will explore how we can work with researcher managers to increase awareness of careers provision, and to make this as relevant as possible to their needs. (website developed and plans to support researcher managers).

The responsible research session on the Researcher Development Programme will be publicised and has been given a new look to increase staff engagement. (increase in number of research supervisors and staff attending Health and Safety training).

The CEDARS data will be analysed for researchers on both a research-only contracts and research and teaching contracts for comparison to the sector. (this data will be disseminated appropriately with relevant actions planned, as required).