Bath Spa University
12 Year Review: HR Excellence in Research Summary report

This report summarises our 12-year review of the HR Excellence in Research initiative, focusing on progress, achievements, and future objectives

1.   Context

1.1   Bath Spa University centres its activities around creativity and innovation and offers a range of inter, trans and multi-disciplinary teaching programmes, with a focus on creative and professional practice. We have three Career Pathways for academic staff, each with distinctive criteria and expectations, with staff supported on an equitable basis 'to realise their talent and thrive, for their own benefit and for the wider good'[1].

1.2   The target audience for the Concordat is staff on the Teaching, Scholarship and Research TSR), and Teaching Scholarship and Employment, Enterprise and Knowledge Exchange partnership (TSK3E) pathways, with a particular focus on Early-Stage Researchers (ESR) and those on Research Only contracts (RO).

2.   How the internal evaluation was undertaken

2.1   Development of the action plans for the Concordat are undertaken by a designated HR Excellence in Research Working Group (HRExRWG), which meets three times a year to review actions, identify progress against them, and to review institutional initiatives and issues that are forwarded to it by the University Research & Ethics Committee (REC).

2.2   HRExRWG also discusses issues raised by the ESR and RO representatives on the group. These are informed by meetings of 'The Network' - an RO led peer support group, and the ESR network – a peer community group.
   o   The Network was set up in 2018 to represent the views of staff on Research Only contracts and is a peer support group for RO staff to share ideas, good practice and joint development and training, as well as offering coaching and other forms of dedicated support to meet their needs. They have a small budget which they manage collectively to support their work. They meet annually with the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research & Enterprise) (PVCRE) to discuss their concerns, and a representative of the group sits on the HRExRWG. There are currently 13 RO staff at Bath Spa.
   o   The ESR Network meets three times a year and each session focuses on an area of training and development identified as a priority from the annual ESR survey. There are currently 47 self-defined ESRs at Bath Spa.

2.3   HRExRWG work together to inform the action plans and the various reports arising from these, including the annual report to Board of Governors which is submitted to UUK, and the HR Excellence in Research renewal of award paperwork. The Head of the Research Office leads the development process in consultation with colleagues.

2.4 A Research Leaders Group also meets three times a year, and issues and actions that arise from this group are fed into the HRExR review process, through representation on the Working Group.

2.5 This academic year (2023/24) the review process has been informed by a survey based on the CEDARS question set, with internal evaluation and review undertaken by the Head of the RO for discussion at the Research Leaders group and HRExRWG. A separate analysis for the Research & Enterprise Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Working Group (REEDIWG) to review EDI concerns and issues and to develop positive actions to address areas of concern has been undertaken by a Psychology Professor who is a member of that group.

3. Governance structures

3.1 HRExRWG reports to the Research & Ethics Committee (REC) Chaired by the PVCRE. Membership includes:
- Research Leads from each academic School
- Strategic Interdisciplinary Research Centre Leads
- 1 Elected representative from each of the following groups:
  - Professors /Readers
  - Mid-career Researchers
  - ESRs (which includes RO staff)
- Professional services staff from the Research Support Office, Library and HR
- Student Union representation

3.2. The HRExRWG is Chaired by the PVCRE and membership includes:
- 2 x members of academic staff
- ESR representative
- RO staff representative
- HR representative
- Head of Research Office
- Postgraduate Co-Ordinator – Graduate College
- Senior Lecturer (Research & Enterprise Development)

3.3 The work of the group is informed by the REEDIWG which comprises of: members of academic staff across the institution (appointed through a self-nomination process against agreed criteria); Head of Research Office and the HR Equalities Project Officer. The group is Chaired by one of our Strategic Interdisciplinary Research Centre Directors.

4. Past Progress and Achievements

4.1 The 2021/22 and 22/23 academic years were a period of transition for the University, as we emerged from the pandemic and reviewed our activities post REF 2021.

4.2 As a professional practice and creative-led institution, the University is keen to ensure that teaching, research and knowledge exchange & enterprise are treated equally across the institution. Three new career pathways have been put in place to enable academic staff to focus on their strengths and career aspirations, and link to our existing promotion pathways, creating a parity of esteem for all. These pathways link to our KEF/TEF/and REF strategies and ensure that research underpins all of our work, and that staff are allocated time to focus on specific activities, rather than trying to meet the demands of all 3 areas. The intention is

to relieve pressure on academic staff and support their mental health and wellbeing, by putting in place more transparent and equitable opportunities for all.

4.3   Building on the success of REF2021, a new Research Strategy[2] was the subject of extensive consultation across the 2021/22 academic year and was approved by the Board of Governors in December 2022. Over 2022/23 we worked with Heads of School to develop the implementation strategy focusing on how we best manage and support research activities across the university to establish a fully funded research environment and culture. This was put in place in academic year 2023/24.

4.4   Environment and Culture

4.4.1 Institution
- An implementation plan was put in place to develop research management structures at school level, and monitoring and evaluation of school led activities through the University Research & Ethics Committee.

4.4.2 Academic Managers of Researchers
- A Research Leaders network is in place which meets on a termly basis. Initiatives put in place this year have included the development of interdisciplinary sandpits to bring staff together to talk about their work and drive future collaborations - showcased at the annual Research Festival - and the creation of a Leadership Coaching scheme for mid-career researchers.

4.4.3 Researchers
- ESR and Researcher Networks meet regularly and the ESR mentoring scheme was relaunched with wider participation this academic year, although finding enough mentors to support the programme remains a challenge.
- HEQR was devolved to Schools in the 2023/23 and 2023/24 academic years to support environment and culture at the local level, and Schools are required to report on the activities they are supporting as part of the annual planning process. This sits alongside a central see fund scheme for pump-priming research activities and collaborations, and our AHRC Impact Accelerator Award which funds projects focussed on developing external collaborations and engaging in participatory co-researched projects.
- HEQR seed funding was provided as follows:
  - 2021/22 academic year: 28 projects (6 led by ESRs, 2 by RO staff)
  - 2022/23 academic year: 18 projects (11 led by ESRs, 2 by RO staff))
  - 2023/24 academic year: 27 projects (14 led by ESRs, 1 by RO staff)
- We are building a range of QR funded case studies showcasing good practice, published on the Research Office SharePoint pages.

4.5   Employment

4.5.1 Institution
- The Research Office offers a research induction workshop three times a year in collaboration with Library Services, and all ESR and RO staff are offered a research mentor.
- In 2022/23 the university introduced three career pathways in: Teaching & Scholarship; Teaching, Scholarship & Research; and Teaching, Scholarship and Enterprise, Employment and Knowledge Exchange (K3E) This has allowed us to tailor training and development

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across the three pathways and enhance our research and enterprise support through the development of aligned modules in the MA in Professional Practice in HE (MAPPHE) – which is mandatory for all new lecturers. RO staff are also encouraged to attend.

- The University has an annual round of promotions to Readers and Professors across all three career pathways, with clear criteria that are circulated to all staff. Promotion workshops are offered to all interested candidates at the start of each annual process.

4.5.2 *Academic Managers of Researchers*

- To support better project management of awards, the RSO has introduced start up meetings with Research Leads, finance and HR to go through terms and conditions of grant prior to the start of funded projects, and Project Management training is offered through the RDP.
- All staff are now given the opportunity to engage with policy development through termly Town Hall meetings, Research Leaders' meetings and the Professoriate, with new Working Groups set up across specific policy areas (e.g. Open Access, KEF, Equality & Diversity).

4.5.3 *Researchers*

- The RSO works closely with research project teams and research staff to support them in their activities and is working with HR to implement an annual research plan into the SDR process which ESRs can discuss with their mentors or research leaders.

4.6   Professional Development

4.6.1 *Institution*

- The Researcher Development Programme (RDP) is mapped to the Vitae RDF and offers a full range of research-related training opportunities for staff and PhD researchers across the university and a new Senior Lecturer in Research & Enterprise Development (SL RED) was appointed in 2022/23 to redevelop and relaunch the programme.
- We received a KTP Capacity Building Grant in the 2022/23 academic year and have used this funding to engage in some sandpit events to link academics to external networks, and to identify local and regional business to target for collaborative activities, staff and student KE, internships and placements.

4.6.2 *Academic Managers of Researchers*

- The Research Supervision training elements within the RDP have been relaunched and are now compulsory for all supervisors. A Supervisors Toolkit is being developed to support this work. Engagement remains a challenge, but progress has been made in developing a peer support network of supervisors and in the sharing of good practice. The University has committed to 10 days of professional and personal development training for the contract and research-only staff community and is working towards this for all academic staff - the Workload Planning pilot will help us with evaluating progress in this area.
- HEQR funding has supported attendance at the NCCPE Engage Academy, Advance HE Diverse Leadership and SW Elevate programmes, and a new leadership coaching programme was launched in 2023/24.

4.6.3 *Researchers*

- The RO staff network provides opportunities for training and development, and from 2021/22 they have been given a small budget to help fund these activities, which they manage themselves, supported by the RSO. This includes one-to-one and peer coaching.
- The new SL RED has refreshed and developed the RDP and associated modules in the MAPPHE, to support new staff in developing the appropriate skills.

5. Strategic Objectives and Implementation Plan

The new Research & Enterprise strategy has been aligned with the University Teaching & Learning Strategy to reinforce the links between TEF/KEF and REF, and to show the value of research to the university, which has often not been recognised as well as it could be in the past. The local CEDARS exercise that was undertaken in the Spring of 2024 has raised concerns around workload and how time is allocated and protected for research, and on supporting staff with their personal and professional development and with longer term career planning. These are key aspects of the Concordat, and an action plan addressing these issues has been developed and is summarised below.

Area	Action Identified
Environment and Culture	The 2024 survey showed that awareness of the Concordat is not strong and work will be done to raise its profile as well as other sector wide research initiatives. There is a clear need to provide opportunities for staff to meet together to engage with their research, and to showcase this more widely across the university, to show that the research undertaken is valued and core to the University's strategy moving forward. Research only staff can feel isolated and not part of a research community as a result of this and we need to embed them more into these activities and events. Issues of mental health and wellbeing centre around workload management practices, and a university wide effort is being put in place to address these issues. The new REEDIWG has been tasked with identifying positive actions that can be put in place to support staff from protected characteristic groups, and to embed these within our policy and practice.
Employment	The research induction works well, but the survey results show that staff are not clear about the opportunities that exist for them to develop their research careers, and that support for this is inequitable across schools, with teaching pressure impacting on their ability to do research. This is a particular issue for ESRs who are also undertaking the Professional Practice in HE Certificate as part of their probation period.The RSO will work closely with HR and the Work Load Planning (WLP) Steering Group to address these issues and to ensure that annual Staff Development Reviews are aligned to WLP discussions. This includes a need for better training and development for mangers. We continue to discuss possible routes towards permanent research pathways for RO staff with Human Resources and Senior Management.
Professional and Career Development	The survey highlighted the need for managers to be trained in career development discussions, and for opportunities for staff to engage with opportunities outside of academia to be identified. Engagement and take-up of personal and professional development and training is low, and the SL RED will be working with Research Leads in schools to embed discipline specific training into school level activities, as well as working with the RO more widely to support events and activities that will bring research staff together to discuss their work and develop collaborate projects, as well as encouraging more informal mentoring and providing opportunities for coaching and leadership training.