



# Lifting off

## Edge Hill University's Research Strategy 2021-25

In the last decade Edge Hill University's research culture has been transformed through the successful implementation of earlier strategies. Research is no longer a marginal activity here, the domain of a tiny fraction of the academic staff and a few part-time PhD students. Instead over 50% of the academic staff are now research active (with a further 10% undertaking postgraduate degrees).

For the next five years, research-capacity building will continue at a pace.<sup>1</sup> Our primary commitment is to increase the production of excellent 3\* and 4\* research that responds to the challenges we face, both local and global, while staying true to our long-held beliefs in promoting inclusion and engaging with marginalised groups. To do this we will:

1. Invest in people:
  - a. Recruit people who are committed to being the best researchers they can be, to create new knowledge which then informs their teaching.
  - b. Support more staff to assume significant responsibility for research (SRR). To that end we will ensure that staff are clear on their responsibilities for research and their activities are supported and monitored annually. For those who are not yet independent researchers, we will plan with them how to achieve that, particularly for those making the transition from practice to research.

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<sup>1</sup> It is helpful to reiterate the Research England definition of research put forward for the REF, according to which it is specified as: '[A] process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared.' [...] 'It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, culture, society, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction. It excludes routine testing and routine analysis of materials, components and processes such as for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytic techniques. It also excludes the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research.' [...] 'It includes research that is published, disseminated or made publicly available in the form of assessable research outputs, and confidential reports.' (Annex C, REF 2021 Guidance on submissions)

- c. Ensure that staff have a clear career development path and continue to nurture both Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and Mid-Career Researchers (MCRs) so as to contribute to succession planning and sustainability.
  - d. Invest in research leadership to ensure the long-term vitality and sustainability of research in all areas.
  - e. Invest in the next generation of researchers by providing a dynamic and supportive environment through the Graduate School and faculties for PGR students with the continuation of the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) scheme accompanied with an increase in externally funded studentships.
  - f. In line with our Learning & Teaching strategy, continue to align research with teaching, to improve both, and to integrate students into staff research programmes of research in order to help raise their employment aspirations and ambitions, and to invest in the next generation of researchers.
2. Ensure the sustainability of our research by securing external funds and investing internal funds strategically on the basis of track record or demonstrable potential (in the case of Early Career Researchers), through:
- a. Preparedness for calls from UKRI and other funders by aligning our research to priority areas, such as the UKRI R&D roadmap and the Government's IRIS themes of AI & Data Science, Healthy Ageing, the Future of Mobility and Clean Growth so as to win a fair share of the 2.4% of GDP target of R&D spend, as set out by the government, through the work of our institutes and centres.
  - b. Investing our Quality-Related (QR) funds strategically in:
    - i. Pump-priming research to enable researchers to make strong external funding bids
    - ii. Supporting ECRs to consolidate their research profile. Giving ECRs priority access to internal funds has led to successful careers as evidenced by the career trajectories of our researchers.
    - iii. Supporting colleagues returning from extended periods of leave including parental/adoption leave, sickness or secondments with priority access to research support funds.
  - c. Assessing the return on our internal research support funds over time in terms of output quality and quantity, subsequent submission of external grant bids and staff progression, because funding decisions will become tougher as bids become more competitive.
3. Optimise the relatively small size of Edge Hill University and our geographical location in the North West to facilitate cross-disciplinary working and engage with partners locally, nationally and globally to address the Government's IRIS themes identified above as well as the regional 'levelling up' agenda by:
- a. Supporting research excellence wherever it is found within the University, complementing discipline-based research with encouraging explicitly the formation of cross-disciplinary research centres to develop research projects which work on a large scale, to ensure their sustainability and their capacity for making an impact. We aim to expand our research institutes by establishing a Data Science STEMM research institute, which builds on the existing research centre, and to establish new research centres to help drive our research development and impact activities.
  - b. Broadening our range of partnerships to co-produce research with users and beneficiaries including regional businesses, the general public, professional practitioners (including those in the creative industries), policy makers and international partners, in line with our Knowledge Exchange and Internationalisation strategies.

- c. Expanding our disciplinary base – during the last REF period we established a Medical School, this will be followed by an Engineering department in the coming cycle. The key strategic aim will be to develop their research profiles and for these new developments to enrich our responses to global challenges.
  - d. Promote collaboration with colleagues in HEIs in the UK and internationally to help increase the reach and significance of our research. We will also seek out research partners in key professional practice areas to ensure that we are engaging with the key concerns of the day.
4. Invest in the research environment:
- a. Invest in research infrastructure that will also be used for teaching and aim to make facilities open to partners wherever possible to maximise synergies.
  - b. Promote the University as a space for intellectual exchange by hosting and developing events that encourage debate and engagement, including our established annual Festival of Ideas.
  - c. Commit to open research through open access both to data and research outputs and enhance the visibility of our research by maximising the potential of Pure and Figshare. While we have no OA transition funds, we will use QR funds strategically to ensure that research findings that are of particular interest to countries on the ODA list are immediately accessible. In addition, we maximise the opportunities presented in long-term agreements with publisher via JISC and other methods to make our research immediately accessible to all.
  - d. Maintain a rigorous governance infrastructure that is fit-for-purpose and able to respond to the changing needs of our researchers as we move into new areas of research.
  - e. Increase the pool of those qualified to supervise doctoral students.
5. Remain committed to ensuring that our strategies and policies benefit all academics equally:
- a. Deliver on our commitments to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the University's People Plan
  - b. Expand the use of equality impact assessments beyond REF preparations and report annually to the University Research & Innovation Committee on key research processes.
  - c. Expand our monitoring of internal funding bid outcomes to examine key EDI characteristics and to identify whether there are training and development needs among some groups in our community
  - d. HR provides analysis of the annual promotion and progression processes to ensure that any unevenness is identified and addressed.
  - e. Ensure that our strategies on Knowledge Exchange, Internationalisation and Learning & Teaching align with our research objectives.

#### KPIs to be achieved by 2026

- Increase the number of those with significant responsibility for research (SRR) to 400
- Increase the PGR community to 300
- Increase the average number of successful PhD completions to 40 per annum
- Increase the number of international research collaborations by 5 per annum evidenced by projects and joint publications
- Increase the number of industrial collaborations (including collaborations with business and professional practice) by 3 per annum evidenced by projects and joint publications
- Increase the amount of research grant income to an average of £2m p.a.
- Increase the amount of research commercialization to benchmark levels for a university of our size, location and character

- Identify and resource circa 40 impact case studies, underpinning them with effective engagement strategies
- Develop and grow key research themes to the extent that we are able to establish 10 new research centres

KPIs are monitored regularly by University Research & Innovation Committee, on behalf of Academic Board

## Endmatter

Title	Research Strategy
Policy Owner	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Approved by	Academic Board
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