

Research Strategy

2016-2020



Edge Hill
University

Edge Hill University's Research Strategy 2016-20

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Summary

Edge Hill University undertakes research of the highest quality, and it is at the core of everything the University does, because research activity is inextricably linked to great teaching and to deep levels of student engagement.

Furthermore, we promote the growth and development of research because:

- Excellence in research is a major factor in enhancing Edge Hill's reputation and it makes a direct and unique contribution to the ethos of our University
- The generation of new insights brings important benefits for society, culture and the economy and, therefore, for our community
- An environment which values and nurtures research is essential for attracting and retaining staff and students of the highest quality
- The applications of research provide important means to generate income, strengthening the capacity for sustainable strategic development
- Staff expertise in research provides the platform on which to build successful teaching programmes.

If there are any queries, please contact the Research Office (RO) at

Research@edgehill.ac.uk for assistance.

Glossary of Terms

Human Resources (HR): The department with responsibility for recruitment and employee management.

Postgraduate Research students (PGR): Students undertaking research as part of their Masters programme or PhD.

Unit of Assessment (UoA): The units of assessment that make up the REF submission.

Key Performance Indicator (KPI): which provide strategic focus towards a business goal.

Research Excellence Framework (REF): The system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions.

Purpose

The following strategy replaces the University's first Research Strategy (2011, last updated May 2014). It builds on the achievements of REF 2014, taking cognisance of subsequent appointments and changes to the HE sector which will lead to a reshaping of the University. The strategy is divided into the following sections:

1. Aims

2. Context
3. Defining research, scholarship and innovation
4. Research priorities
5. People
6. Resources
7. Research culture
8. Key performance indicators and monitoring

Research Strategy

1. Aims

Edge Hill University achieved its own research-degree awarding powers in 2008, and established a Graduate School two years later in 2010. In 2012 we introduced a Graduate Teaching Assistant scheme which saw for the first time at the University the strategic distribution of full-time funded PhD scholarships. The scheme has proved a success that has been expanded and enhanced, especially in light of our achievements in REF 2014, which latter marked a notable improvement of the University's research performance.

We now plan to build on that solid foundation to achieve new levels of excellence. The following are our high-level research aims from now to the end of the decade. We will:

- 1.1 Produce world-class research outputs which achieve impact outside of the academy
- 1.2 Attract, retain, nurture and develop academic staff, supporting and enhancing their research aspirations
- 1.3 Attract more postgraduate research students and manage their timely and successful completion
- 1.4 Provide the highest-quality facilities, resources and environment in which research may flourish
- 1.5 Increase research income and overhead recovery
- 1.6 Form strategic partnerships to enhance our research culture

2. Context

2.1 Commitment to high-quality research

Edge Hill remains committed to producing high-quality research across a range of disciplines which addresses key issues in those disciplines. The University is also committed to responding to and engaging with national and international research agendas. In particular, it strives to produce research that has direct application to challenges that concern professional practitioners, business, third sector organisations and community groups. The University believes that it has an important role to play as a resource to the local and regional community by providing a rich environment where individuals and groups can come together to debate and

discuss ideas with those who are at the forefront of the debates in the higher education sector, professional practice, community organisations and business..

2.2 University's mission

Research and teaching are central to Edge Hill University's mission. Great teaching is invariably underpinned by excellent research and the student experience is enhanced by being taught by those who are the forefront of research in the discipline. Similarly, research is essential to successful knowledge exchange and engagement with wider society, which is also a core part of the University's mission. In recent years, the University has revised its approach to research resulting in:

- Better targeted internal research funds
- A coordinated programme of research capacity building
- A staff recruitment policy which places a greater emphasis on research capacity as an essential criterion
- Greater attention paid to strategic and differential workload allocations

2.3 REF 2014

A more refined focus on research and innovation has paid dividends in REF 2014. As a consequence, our quality-related (QR) research income from HEFCE has increased substantially, thus providing a stable 5-year basis for strategic investment in taking research at Edge Hill up another level, especially in terms of enabling facilities such as research-management systems.

2.4 Income sources

Nevertheless, the enhanced annual QR income is not sufficient to fund all our aspirations and we need to diversify very significantly our sources of income to support research, whether directly or indirectly, and to increase the amount of overhead recovery. The Research Office will support and monitor performance in this regard, providing a regular report to University Research Committee.

3 Defining research, scholarship and innovation

3.1 Definition of research

Edge Hill will measure the quality of its research through the expert-peer evaluation provided by the REF and through the reach and significance of its impact. It is helpful to reiterate the HEFCE definition of research put forward for the REF, according to which it is 'a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared. It **includes** work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, 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, 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'¹. All of what we consider as research must be weighed against that extended definition.

3.2 Determining the nature of the allegation

The same REF source defines scholarship as 'the creation, development and maintenance of the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines, in forms such as dictionaries, scholarly editions, catalogues and contributions to major research databases'.² We adopt this definition of scholarship and note that it involves producing published outputs.

3.3 Public engagement

Engaging the public with research can assume many different forms, among which it is usual to include: participation in festivals, working with museums and galleries, involving the public as researchers, working with people in schools and health-care settings and contributing to new-media enabled discussion fora. We also seek to engage existing stakeholder groups with a view to furthering an agenda for the co- production of useful knowledge which may be applied in many different contexts. This strategy should also be read in conjunction with the University's emerging Enterprise Strategy.

4. Research priorities

4.1 Capacity building

Our over-riding priority for the next five years is to achieve another step-change in our research-capacity building, enabling us to undertake exciting, innovative and, in selective cases, world-leading research. Specifically, we will:

- Support research excellence wherever it is found within the University, accepting that most research activity is discipline-based, but we encourage explicitly the formation of clusters, groups and centres in order to develop research projects which work on a large scale, to ensure their sustainability and their capacity for making an impact
- Invest specifically in interdisciplinary research, through the research centres and our three research institutes, especially where it benefits society, health, and culture
- Broaden our range of partnerships to co-produce research with users and beneficiaries who will include: the general public, professional practitioners (including those in the creative industries), and policy makers.

4.2 Research institutes

We have created three pan-University research institutes: I4P (the Institute for Public Policy and Professional Practice), the PGMI (Postgraduate Medical Institute) and ICE (Institute for Creative Enterprise). These each provide a distinct forum to bring together researchers and users of research from across the University and beyond.

¹ REF 02/2011 *Assessment framework and guidance on submissions*, p.48. The emphasis is to be found in the original.

² REF 02/2011 *Assessment framework and guidance on submissions*, p.48.

4.3 Developing themes

The institutes will work collaboratively to share good practice and to develop themes which are important to the University's identity and aspirations.

4.4 Engagement with partners

We will engage with external partners to ensure that our research agendas are grounded in real-world problems, towards the solution of which our research can make what is perceived by others to be a valuable contribution. So we will develop closer relationships with key stakeholders, such as the external advisory boards of our research institutes, to ensure that our large research projects are guided by a spirit of the co-production of useful knowledge. To that end we will promote greater public awareness and debate of key issues affecting society by hosting public lectures, round tables and Q&A events, both on campus and in association with partner organisations.

4.5 Financial sustainability

We will leverage funding through external partnerships so as to provide technical infrastructure which enables us to attract and retain strong commercial partnerships which focus on research and development, in order to place our research culture on a stable and sustainable financial footing.

We will maintain and enhance our research reputation, income and future investment projects through achieving the best possible scores in the next REF.

We will raise the profile of our research and innovation through effective dissemination and engagement with media, especially social media. An inaugural, externally-facing, *Festival of Ideas* was held in 2016 and it will become a regular feature of our research environment.

5. People

Universities have an obligation to invest in the next generation of researchers and teachers.

5.1 Investment in staff

We will continue to invest in our staff, who are our most valuable resource, to enable them to deliver world-leading research, or to support the delivery and application of that research so as to achieve transformational impact

5.2 Academic appointment

We will attract increasingly strong fields of candidates for academic posts at all levels and make research-activity an essential criterion for most academic appointments

5.3 Career development

We will nurture and develop the careers of academic staff, and monitor individual 5- year research plans through the appraisals process and take any reasonable action appropriate to ensure that outputs promised are delivered in a timely

fashion. Once in post:

- We expect all academic staff to engage in research or, as a minimum, current professional practice in their academic discipline, and to publish on that basis in open access journals, in monographs or in edited books, or, where appropriate, produce Practice-as-Research (PaR) outputs which are research-led performances or artefacts, properly captured and documented. It is accepted that not all academic staff are likely to be submitted as principal-author contributors to a REF, but there are teamworking roles which the University may reasonably expect of all academic staff in relation to supporting, disseminating and nurturing the research agenda
- We will require a 5-year research plan of all academic staff, reflecting that expectation
- We will monitor individual progress annually in a supportive and constructive manner
- We will support academic staff to become and remain research-active through appraisal, mentoring, staff development and the Research Investment Fund

5.4 Workload

We will review our approach to constructing the academic timetable and ensure that fair and transparent workload models are in place and that they recognise and support the University's research aspirations

5.5 Excellence in research

We will achieve the HR excellence in research award and will implement in full the *Concordat to support the career development of researchers* and provide a comprehensive researcher development programme reflecting the Researcher Development Framework

5.6 Athena Swan

As it is an important part of our founding ethos and distinct cultural heritage, we embrace equality and diversity and we will build on the achievement of our Athena Swan bronze award by putting forwards cases for departmental Athena Swan awards, Charter Marks, and other badges of recognition, through implementing the Athena Swan action plan and taking all reasonable steps to support and develop the careers of all our researchers

5.7 Early career researchers

We will continue to support early career researchers, providing for them a stimulating and challenging intellectual environment, as well as materially in terms of conference attendance, other networking opportunities and mobility schemes such as the Erasmus and Marie Skłodowska Curie programmes

5.8 Mentoring

We will identify and support emerging research leaders through mentoring and through external schemes such as the Aurora programme

5.9 Postgraduate researchers

Postgraduate researchers are the lifeblood of any university's research culture and we will:

- Develop further our highly-successful Graduate Teaching Assistant programme
- Provide high quality training and development for all PGR students, reflecting the expectations of the research councils
- Provide incentives for departments which are successful in attracting fully-funded PhDs
- Increase the number of international, funded PhDs
- Expect timely completions within 3-4 years, and expect most of our PGR population to be studying in full-time mode
- Enhance further the training provided to PhD supervisors and establish a license system to monitor individual uptake of training
- Support the career development of research staff, including post-doctoral fellows

6 Resources

The University has made significant investment in research infrastructure in the last five years. This will continue on a strategic and selective basis. Specifically:

6.1 Infrastructure

We will make available the best possible infrastructure which we can afford for research

6.2 Internal research funding

We will continue to use internal research funding strategically and both encourage, incentivise and support strong bids for external funding

6.3 QR funding

Indeed while we have increased substantially our income from QR funding as a result of REF 2014 scores, we must complement these funds from external sources. Therefore we will:

- Increase the quality and quantity of our bids to research councils and major charities
- Increase the number and quality of bids which we make for industrial funding in support of research
- Develop a small number of strategic partnerships with external partners in order to bid for larger sums of research funding through research councils and international funding agencies
- Develop collaborations with highly experienced colleagues at other HEIs to bid for research funding to support larger projects

6.4 Research investment

We will continue to invest in new facilities to support excellent research and innovation, such as Human Tissue and other Biotechnology labs, a 4K Computer- assisted Virtual Environment (CAVE) and a Knowledge Exchange Centre, taking advantage, where possible of external funding, which will provide endorsement for our strategy.

6.5 Research management system

We will also invest in a research management system, which will dovetail with Library, Finance and HR systems, to facilitate the generation of accurate and timely management information on research performance.

6.6 GTA scheme

Building on our very successful GTA scheme, we will grow substantially our postgraduate research population and increase sharply our record of successful PhD completions, taking advantage of new funding arrangements for PGR students available from autumn 2018, as well as tapping into international networks for recruiting funded PhD students of proven quality.

6.7 Financial management

We will continue to maintain sound financial management of our research activities to ensure their sustainability.

7 Research Culture

7.1 Administrative structures

Learning & teaching, research and enterprise are the pillars on which successful universities are supported; we will continue to develop and mature our administrative structures so as to weave these strands of Edge Hill's activities seamlessly

7.2 Concordat

We will implement and embed procedures and processes which underpin the integrity and governance of research across the University, such as the annual review of the *Concordat* by the Academic Board and the Board of Governors

7.3 University's mission

We will ensure that research remains where it belongs, at the heart of the University's values, vision and mission

7.4 Annual reporting

Departmental, faculty and institute research strategies and plans will interlock with the University strategy, with faculties and institutes making annual reports to University Research Committee and research being an explicit rubric in spring planning and annual monitoring of University activities

7.5 Edge Hill Research Archive

Individual members of the academic staff will keep details and holdings in the Edge Hill Research Archive (EHRA) up to date and will generally comply with the requirements of open access and research data management

7.6 Social media

We will promote the University's research through responsible use of social media and other public engagement activities

7.7 Benchmarking

We will continue to benchmark competitors in the sector and incorporate aspects of good practice which come from elsewhere

8 Key Performance Indicators and Monitoring Research KPIs

Objective	Target
Proportion of academic staff returned in the REF	50% of academic staff will be eligible for inclusion in next REF, based on a 2* threshold for outputs
REF rating by academic return	Improvements on REF 2014 in all cases, with the University average above 2.5
External research grant income	To have attracted £3m in the current REF period
Number of PGRs registered	200 at the census point for the next REF
Number of PGR completions	100 between 1 Jan 2014 and 31 Dec 2020
Grant income from industry and commerce	To have attracted £3m in the current REF period
Quality of REF impact case studies	To have developed and documented at least one case study more than the minimum requirement for each UoA likely to reach at least 2* standard

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

Endmatter

Title	Research Strategy
Policy Owner	Director of the Research Office
Approved by	Academic Board
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