

Lifting off

In the last decade Edge Hill University's research culture has been transformed through the successful implementation of our research 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. 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.

We remain committed to ensuring that our strategies, policies, and practices benefit all academics equally and to delivering on our commitments to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the University's People Plan.

We achieved the HR Excellence in Research (HR EiR) award in 2018 following our first gap analysis and proposed action plan. We have worked hard since to support researchers by implementing our identified HR EiR recommendations and building on a positive trajectory with our inclusion agenda.

Our self-evaluation processes

Our evaluation was led through Academic Career Development Implementation Group (ACDIG) chaired by Professor George Talbot, Pro Vice-Chancellor Research. ACDIG has been active since 2016 with defined Terms of Reference. Academics from all faculties are integral members of this group. The group meets with the purpose of supporting personal, professional and career development aligned to the Researcher Development Framework and currently oversees the delivery of the Concordat Action Plan for Research Staff.

This evaluation was coordinated by Senior HR Partner, Daniel Smith and supported by HR Partner – Project Lead, Aisling Benson. Oversight and strategic leadership have been provided by Head of Human Resources, Vicky Bosward supported by Director of Research, Dr Nikki Craske and Dr Jane Moore, Pro Vice-Chancellor (EDI) and Dean of Education; additional input was provided by the Researcher Development Support Manager in the Research Office, Joanne Morris - demonstrating Institutional commitment to researcher support at a strategic level.

The Concordat defines researchers as individuals whose primary responsibility is to conduct research and who are employed specifically for this purpose. The primary audience is research staff, e.g., postdoctoral researchers, research fellows, research assistants. Given the number of these staff are so low at our university, we have included other groups who actively engage in research as beneficiaries in our Concordat action plan. These include postgraduate researcher students, and staff on teaching and research contracts who have significant responsibility for research.

Our evidence and success measures

Our evidence and success measures are evidence based and draw upon: staff satisfaction surveys, sector benchmark reports, case studies and examples of best practice, professor round table events, managers' surveys, direct consultation with researchers and central support via the Research Office and Graduate School; institutional work on Athena Swan and maintaining our Bronze award; the University's Vision and Strategic plan, Research Strategy, People Plan and EDI Strategy which provide aligned KPIs and clear direction into the middle of the decade. The review has also been informed by feedback captured from research staff from the professors and readers network, Graduate School and research leads in relation to the research environment, employment and professional and career

development via performance and development review (PDR), recruitment, progression and promotion rounds, probation reviews and exit interviews. We were also able to analyse engagement and penetration levels with our learning and development offer and wiki environments.

Our success measures, as defined by key performance indicators and action plans within the respective strategies, are monitored by the appropriate committees e.g., our previous research strategy had a KPI to increase the number of academic staff we submit to REF 2021 to 50%

Looking back at our HR Excellence in Research Action Plan 2018

We are proud of the progress we have made over the last two years and provide our original HR EiR Action Plan (Appendix 1) to the panel to demonstrate the detailed completed and rolled over actions against the seven 2008 Concordat principles and summarise some of our key achievements here.

Principle 1 Recruitment and Selection

The Research Strategy (2021-2025), People Plan (2021-2025) and EDI Strategy (2021-2025) and their KPIs are approved and in place giving strategic direction to our research, people and inclusion agendas for the next 5 years – the focus on research as central to academic careers is now embedded.

Refined career pathways in place providing clarity on criteria for progression through academic grade 8 – 10 and promotion to reader, senior fellow and professor.

Principle 2 Recognition and Value

We redeveloped our PDR process, increasing the emphasis on the career development discussion, how individuals engage with strategic priorities and their research. Coupled with a move to an accessible online system PDR engagement rose by 17% to 86% in 2019-20. The e-enabled system provides us with the ability to analyse career development themes and design supportive staff development programmes around them.

The HR Annual Report now provides the Board of Governors narrative around our workforce profile and the work we are involved in to diversify the staff community.

Academic colleagues are supported to succeed and have clear objectives but our commitment to DORA and the use of responsible metrics ensured they are not judged using metrics alone and that assessment used for the purposes of recruitment and advancement is a peer review of the researcher's work as a whole.

Principle 3, 4, 5 Support, Career Development and Researchers' Responsibilities

Academic engagement with our staff development offer increased by 73% in 2019, with a notable 44% increase amongst our Graduate Teaching Assistants, whose primary purpose is to complete a PhD – we continue to explore and implement ways to drive these metrics further in 2021-22 and beyond.

Our researcher development programme is explicitly benchmarked against the Researcher Development Framework and staff are encouraged to conduct regular learning needs analysis which are compulsory for GTAs as part of their annual review.

Principle 6 Equality and Diversity

Renewal of our institutional Athena Swan Bronze Award, four departments achieving their own bronze awards (Psychology, Computer Science, Health and Sport), Faculty of Education is currently under review and several more departments are now working towards an award.

The online equality, diversity and inclusion training rolled out in 2019-20 was the first of its kind (at EHU) to be mandated to all staff and enjoyed a 93% engagement rate in 2019-20.

Despite an 8% decrease in recruitment activity for academic staff (due to Covid-19 related recruitment freezes) our applications increased by 17.8% and were particularly diverse for Graduate Teaching Assistants – with 66% declaring BAME heritage. a 13.6% growth on the previous year. 34.3% of applicants for academic posts declared BAME heritage – a growth of 6.4% compared to 2018-19 whilst 10.7% of our senior academic and professor applications were received from BAME applicants.

Principle 7 Implementation and Review

In 2020, we formed a strategic EDI Steering Group (EDISG) as a new committee to ensure we are performing against our strategic commitments within the EDI arena We also published our EDI Strategy and supporting Action Plan progress against which, will be reported to the Board of Governors on an annual basis.

Objectives we will carry forward into our new Action Plan

We originally proposed to launch a CROS Survey by the end of 2018 but chose not to go ahead. The rationale for this is that we do not currently, routinely engage *research-only* academics on a full time, permanent basis, instead requiring our substantive staff to undertake teaching alongside their research responsibilities. When we do engage research-only posts they are generally on very short-term contracts (months) and are not post-doctoral posts but can provide pre-masters students with valuable experience.; more recently, however, we have appointed some externally funded post-doctoral research assistants and we are taking seriously our commitments embedded in the Concordat to ensure that they have appropriate access to staff development and other research support resources. We are aware that this group is likely to grow in coming years and so we will continue to explore creative ways to listen to and action feedback from our research community over the next two years and consider CEDARS as an alternative listening route for this community in 2021-22. All PIs are reminded of their responsibilities with respect to the professional development of their PDRAs.

We are still to source an appropriate Talent Management System to enable the connecting and sharing of data and will continue our exploration in 2021 and an implementation beyond.

Looking to the future

A detailed action plan (Appendix 2) has been developed to set out our areas of focus and strategy for the next two years and beyond, with relation to HR EIR. This action plan will continue to evolve and be focused on the new Concordat, as a gap analysis is completed, and actions are developed to fill the gaps and strengthen our researcher support. Progress will be monitored by and reported to EDISG.

Our success measures will include:

- Increased awareness of the Concordat commitments across Edge Hill using pulse surveys to measure the impact of improved communication mechanisms
- High levels of researcher engagement in policies and initiatives emerging out of HREiR action plan
- Improved researcher voice and visibility in university strategy and policy making arenas.
- Responding creatively to a changing research landscape and funding opportunities post COVID-19.
- Progress against actions reported, including seeking, and responding to researcher feedback through CEDARS or appropriate, alternative listening routes.
- Annual monitoring of HR EIR of progress against success measures to the Board of Governors via EDISG