



HR Excellence in Research Review report January 2022

The University of Hull has held the [HR Excellence in Research Award](#) since January 2012 and the University has demonstrated its sustained commitment to excellent researcher development through continuing recognition offered by this award.

This report forms part of the University's progress review submission to the HR Excellence in Research Recognition process. Two further documents are submitted alongside this report:

- a detailed progress report for the period January 2020 to January 2022
- an updated action plan for the remaining period (to 2024) modified to the new template required

All documents, including previous years can be viewed at this address <https://www.hull.ac.uk/work-with-us/research/governance>

Introduction

The period 2020-2022 covered by this report has been one of change, at an institutional, sector and international level.

The University of Hull context has changed over the last three years and continues to do so through a University wide transformation programme. This has resulted in wide scale restructuring and a much reduced staffing. This has inevitably affected priorities across the University as we adapt to new working environments. Within this already complex transition the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have further impacted our focus and our ability to deliver everything we had intended within our 2020-2022 plan.

Having said that we have used the challenges above to exploit opportunities and we are proud of a number of the developments we have made, some of which were unforeseen during our planning, but nevertheless have proved valuable. We are also taking the opportunity to learn from Covid and have already implemented an Agile working policy.

Within the University most development events are available to all staff. There is considerable crossover between events. Audiences are specifically identified in the event description and where appropriate targeted advertisement is used to raise awareness.

A continuing issue is the lack of ability to separate out research staff within the data. Where our systems will allow us to identify researchers we will seek to modify those to provide this filter as a priority during the next planning period. In the meantime we will identify in the progress report where the numbers are drawn from a larger population of academic staff.

There are areas around contracts and career progression where we have failed to progress in any meaningful manner. This will be pursued during the next phase of the plan.

The University continues its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion through a commitment to the [Business in the Community Race at Work Charter](#) offering greater flexibility to set an agenda relevant to our institution's specific needs. Unlike the Advance HE Race Equality Charter (REC) to which we had previously committed, the Race at Work Charter supports our pledged commitment to racial inclusion and transparency in publishing progress outcomes rather than documenting the process.

The University holds the Bronze [Athena Swan](#) award, 3 of the 4 Faculties hold or are submitting for Bronze awards, two Schools also have the Bronze award. We are also a [Disability Confident](#) employer. We are pleased that the current cohort of the [Aurora Programme](#) includes three researchers out of 27 participants.

The University is also a signatory to the [University Mental Health Charter](#). The UMHC is aimed at improving mental health and wellbeing outcomes for students and staff. We anticipate achieving the UMHC Charter Award in July 2022. Furthermore, the University has signed up to the [Mindful Employer Charter](#) since 2017.

Research context

Researchers have had many challenges during the last years in both the funding environment and with the delivery of projects, however, the University's researchers have shown themselves to be adaptable and innovative in how they've continued to engage with the funding programmes and deliver ongoing projects. Researchers have continued to submit a similar number of research applications, and awarded grant numbers and value have now returned to similar pre-Covid-19 rates.

The University has engaged with the EU's programmes for research and innovation, therefore any restrictions to UK organisations from participating in EU funding e.g. Horizon Europe, due to Brexit would be a significant risk. The UK government's ongoing negotiation for an associated status, its 'financial safety net' scheme and information events held at the University have allowed our researchers to engage significantly with the programme. Since its launch in early 2021 Hull researchers have submitted nineteen applications.

How did we undertake the internal review?

The University governs all our concordats through a single Concordat steering group (CSG). Membership of the group includes ADRs, HR, Directors of research, Director of Research and Innovation, 2 PDRAs, Students' Union, Teaching Excellence and the Director of the Doctoral College. The CSG reports into the University Leadership Team via the PVC for Research and Enterprise. Our Head of OD is a member of CSG and also heads up out Athena Swan self-assessment team.

This review has been conducted by a core team of key assessors. The team has consulted with members of the Concordat Steering Group and with Faculty personal identified as having a primary responsibility for the staff in question, to understand better what has been taking place and its impact. Researcher views have been gathered within Faculties and shared with the review team. Research staff were surveyed (CEDARS) in spring 2021.

Data used to support the documentation has been provided from existing systems relating to human resource records, including development and appraisal data, and data supplied through Faculty teams.

Key achievements and progress against the action plan

43.9% of our identified actions have been completed. The main barriers to progress have been a loss of focus and/or our inability to prioritise actions during such a challenging period. Listed below are our top three achievements:

1. Researcher Development Programme (RDP).

A new programme was developed and launched in September 2020. The pandemic required us to reconsider our approach. Subsequently an increasing number of development opportunities have been converted to online delivery. Some of those have used Microsoft Teams to replace the face to face experience, others have been redeveloped into a more flexible resource. Examples include Appraisal training and Induction, both of these are now available 24/7, previously staff would need to book onto the next planned session. Staff reported that they needed a much more just-in-time solution and we are now pleased to be able to provide this through our Virtual Learning Environment, Canvas.

In building the RDP programme we have worked with external organisations and internal experts and utilised their considerable expertise to provide our research staff with the best support in developing their skills and knowledge.

There is some further work required around measuring satisfaction.

2. Mentoring.

Mentoring has been widely implemented within the University academic community. An approach of 'let a thousand flowers bloom' has been adopted and all Faculties are now following a policy of mentors required for all academic staff. The approaches used and the monitoring mechanisms vary between Faculties, departments and institutes, and the team believe that there are valid reasons for different approaches. The University will move forwards to evaluate each approach, share good practice and standardise where appropriate. One particular action will be to understand what monitoring is required and to put that in place.

3. Governance, review and implementation.

An area of considerable impact has been an appointment within FACE where a post has been identified (20% FTE) to support early career academics and researchers. A number of workshops have been run within the faculty and individual support and development sessions are provided to all identified staff including regular one-to-one meetings. Staff are signposted to further support as required and the faculty has a clear view of development needs. Three sessions were provided in 2020 and a further eight through 2021.

The success of the role within FACE has led to a similar role recently being created in FBLP. The remaining two faculties are considering their own approach.

Further work is required around a research staff association or equivalent and greater opportunities for researchers to participate in decision making opportunities.

Next steps

The University has recently launched its new strategic plan, Strategy 2030. Against this new focus we will ensure that researchers experience our inclusive, empowering and progressive values and that staff are supported in ensuring that 'Our inclusive, supportive and responsible community will enable talented individuals to flourish.'

The forward looking part of the plan uses a new template introducing a number of new 'commitments'. The remaining activities from the previous template have been updated and transferred to this new 2020-2022 action plan.

Priority 2020-2022 actions

1. we will improve our reporting systems to filter by researchers and research managers. Achieving this will allow us to monitor and report systematically across the institution and identify where further action is required. Without this ability we can gather data only at the local level and requiring time allocation to do so. With this improvement to our systems we will also be able to identify where areas are higher achieving and learn from their success.
2. we will carry out the actions related to contracts and career review which have had little or no progress to date. Our key goals here are to ensure our processes are robust, transparent and support our researchers, their managers and other supporters in helping researchers move along their chosen trajectory. The targets for this area are around improved overall satisfaction with our processes, a key part of which must be transparency and to achieve this we will work with our researchers and their managers and other stakeholders to develop and include appropriate information in the Researcher's Charter which will identify rights and responsibilities of researchers, research managers and the institution.
3. we will improve our central feedback processes so that we can more effectively hear what our researchers and their managers need and want and so that we can prioritise our actions to have the most impact on their experience. Will also see to increase research involvement in decision making around the University. The Researcher's Charter development project will enable a conversation with researchers and managers that will raise awareness of the Concordat and explore a more systemic method of gathering researcher feedback on a continuous basis and provide an opportunity to more effectively include researchers in decision making. We will also explore other methods to 'get under the skin' of issues including further work on raising satisfaction with appraisals.