



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH



UNIVERSITY
OF HULL

HR Excellence in Research Award: University of Hull 12-year review

Institutional context

The University of Hull is a research-led, civic university which has been delivering education and research since 1927. A regional university and joint medical school, serving the Humber and East Yorkshire, our engagement with, and service for, our community is a core agenda for the institution. In 2022 we launched 'Strategy 2030' which shaped our university's vision for, and underscores our commitment to, sustainability and social justice as two pillars of our institutional mission. Our stated objectives are to drive the interdisciplinary and collegial approach required to pursue research that delivers high-impact solutions to global challenges. In the past year we have accelerated progress, appointing a new Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Research and Enterprise and an Executive Director, Research, Knowledge Exchange, and Commercialisation. Our current research strategy highlights our approach to researcher development, defining how we will attract, support, develop, and empower a diverse community of talented researchers and students, enabling them to deliver world-leading research and innovation. One of the most improved institutions nationally in REF2021, we have strategic research foci and established research institutes focussing on energy and environment, historical and modern slavery, and clinical and applied health research. Our research is improving outcomes for cancer patients, predicting coastal, estuarine and river flood risk, exploring treaties as living and contested instruments of inter-cultural diplomacy, and reducing social injustice.

We were first awarded HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) in 2012 and are steadfast in our ongoing commitment to its objectives. Enhancing our research environment, our research culture, and the experience of our researchers, are core objectives through which to realise this shift, alongside the growth of our research capacity and our researcher capability. In 2022 the university established an academic lead for this work, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research Culture), and a corresponding Research Culture and Researcher Development (RCRD) team. We are now working to further catalyse this research landscape, our intention being to launch a new research strategy in September 2024 detailing how we will enable sharing of best practice across our institution, grow our research income and capacity, prepare effectively for REF 2029¹, significantly enhancing our research environment and culture.

Our academic community is diverse, within which we have 402 academic staff on teaching and research contracts, 104 postdoctoral researchers attached to externally funded research projects, and 99 clinicians. We also have 460 postgraduate research students, supported centrally through our Doctoral College. Supporting these researchers, we have 50 technicians and 114 research enabling professional services staff. Hull's commitment to the Researcher Development Concordat serves not only our early career researchers² (ECRs), but also the wider research community.

¹REF delayed until 2029 to allow HEIs more time to prepare for implementation using HESA data to determine volume measures and for testing and piloting of new approaches in, for example, the expanded people, culture, and environment element.

² We define ECRs as researchers typically within 5 years of their PhD, whether on continuing or fixed-term contracts.

Governance structure

Responsibility for the 2019 researcher development concordat and 2022-2024 action plan implementation sits within the university Concordats Steering Group (CSG) chaired by the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Research Culture. Preparation of the 12-year HREiR submission, including a review of progress towards the 2022-2024 action plan, gap analysis and consultation, was led by a concordat oversight group (COG), assisted by a task and finish group, including researcher representatives. CSG receive, and discuss, quarterly reports from the concordat lead relating to implementation, delivery, and impact of the action plan. CSG Terms of Reference ensure membership includes the Associate Dean for Research (ADR) for each faculty, Directors of Research and Innovation and Doctoral College, and researcher representatives at different career stages including Post Doctoral Research Associates (PDRAs) and those undertaking doctoral study. Membership extends to representatives of human resources (HR), teaching excellence academy, technical staff, and equality, diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). Figure 1 details CSG reporting directly to University Research Committee (URC) with institutional oversight provided through Senate. Research staff are represented at each level of the governance structure, detailed in table 1.

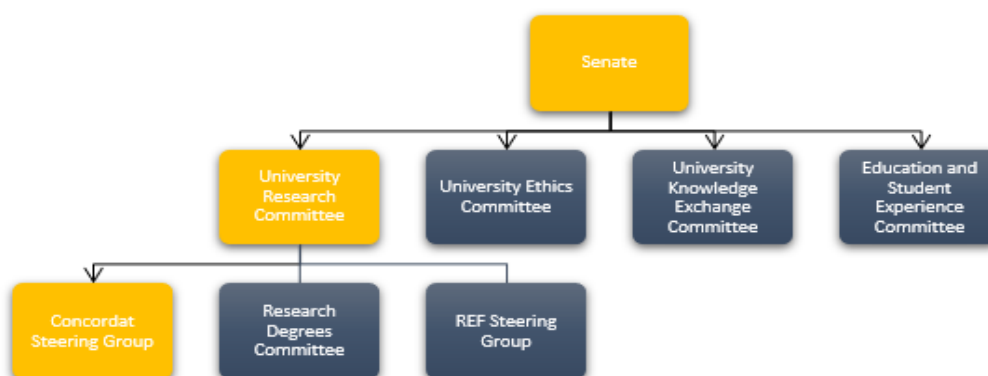


Figure 1: Governance structure

Committee	Membership	Research staff	(%) R
Concordats Steering Group	Chair (Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor) 11 appointed members 10 ex-officio members	3 Researchers 4 ADRs	31.81%
University Research Committee	Chair (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC), Research and Enterprise) 7 appointed /9 ex-officio members	2 PDRAs 4 Academic staff PVC, Research	35.29%
University Senate	Chair (Vice-Chancellor) 9 appointed members 7 student / 35 ex-officio members	PVC, Research 4 Deans 13 ex-officio	34.61%

Table 1: Committee membership

Research culture, employment practice, and researcher development priorities are also articulated, and reported upon, as part of related awards and external requirements. The university successfully renewed its bronze Athena Swan status in 2022, reporting gender equality progress to Advance HE and Horizon Europe, it holds Disability Confident Employer and Mindful Employer Charter status, and publishes an 'Annual Statement of Research Integrity, and submits a Concordat annual report to Universities UK (UUK).

How we conducted our internal evaluation

Hearing the researcher ‘voice’ was a primary consideration in our internal evaluation methodology. We invited direct involvement of researchers at different career stages, sharing their experiences and contributing to the gap analysis and development of the forward-looking action plan. We established a Concordat Oversight Group (COG), to lead the internal review and report to CSG. We commissioned a task and finish group, with formal terms of reference, who undertook the gap analysis. Hybrid meetings, in-person and virtual, were held bi-weekly, providing opportunity for input and debate. Table 2 presents the full range of consultation methodologies employed during the review period. We identified existing consultation methods which would provide useful information and facilitated bespoke workshops, focus groups and surveys with research staff and those supporting research, including technicians. Due to the planned institutional research culture and EDI survey, run through November and December 2023, and potential survey fatigue, we chose not to engage in Culture, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers Survey (CEDARS) 2023.








<i>Method</i>	<i>Aim</i>	<i>Audience</i>
 Online Survey	To establish levels of awareness of the concordat	New academic starters (1.8.22-27.2.23) 18.1% response rate
 CEDARs 2021 survey	Used as a benchmark from which to determine progress, or otherwise, about working conditions, employment practice, culture, and career development	Research staff, PDRAs, early career researchers and research managers (21.6% response rate)
 Written submission	To gather quantitative and qualitative updates (previous action plan) and suggestions for further developments from action owners	Response sought from ADRs, Deans, HR Partners, Research Directors, RCRD team and PVC, Research.
 Focus groups	To gather feedback about the lived experience of research staff in relation to university culture, values, and behaviour.	140 staff (Research leaders, early career researchers, technicians and professional staff supporting research)
 Cultural audit and stress survey	To gather anonymous information from all staff relating to institutional values.	Audit (5.96% response rate) / stress survey (39.09% response rate)
 Networks	To gather suggestions and specific actions for the forward-looking action plan.	THRIVE ³ researcher network (26) / faculty forums (23) / Research Directors (13)
 Work groups	To gather suggestions and specific actions for the forward-looking action plan. (including use of ‘Mentimeter’ to gather views).	HR expert group (5) / PDRAs groups (8+9) / Concordats steering group (16)

Table 2: Consultative methods to review progress towards the 2022-2024 action plan and to inform the 2024-2027 HREiR action plan.

³ The Hull early-career Research Integrated deVEIopment

Past progress, key achievements, and barriers to success

A red, amber, and green (RAG) rating of our 2022-2024 action plan highlights progress, or otherwise, against each of the 49 criteria. We have made substantial progress towards 13 (26.53%), have partially delivered against 31 (63.26%), with 5 (10.20%) remaining undelivered. Mindful of the landscape change since our 10-year audit and the significant impact of the COVID19 pandemic on research activity, we have, nevertheless, made notable progress toward all three Concordat principles.

Environment and Culture: EDI training completion rates have improved with 96.2% of research managers trained. We have established an EDI governance board with an EDI in Research committee as one of multiple sub-committees. Pilot schemes to support researchers on sabbatical leave have been well received and our parents and carers network has been instrumental in enhancing support for researchers with additional responsibilities. Refresher training for mental health first aiders and the establishment of a health and wellbeing board supports the mental, physical, and emotional health of our research community.

Employment: Our research leaders have been actively engaged in skill development, including project management, and we have significantly enhanced our support for those seeking promotion. Institutional induction events have been reviewed and our annual awards and inaugural lecture series have heightened the profile of researchers at all career levels.

Professional, and Career Development: We have developed a flexible portfolio of professional development activity and can evidence increased levels of engagement, ranging from online modules, workshops and writing retreats. We developed a CPD guide for researchers and their line managers with an introductory video and have improved our data collection and reporting. Notwithstanding these positive initiatives, pilots, and ongoing activity, our overall progress has been limited. The impact of our nascent RCRD activity, including THRIVE, while fundamental to the stability and success of our future research environment, is in the early stages of development and has been propelled through a recognition of the need to accelerate researcher professional development. Our progress report reveals limited activity related to career development meetings, a diminution in satisfaction levels among researchers and unsatisfactory levels of engagement with research integrity training. It also reveals limited success in embedding one of the core Concordat principles, namely that researchers are aware of, and are supported to actively engage in, 10 days of continuous professional development, although we have undertaken significant work in the past year to respond to this. In undertaking the review, we identified a small, yet highly significant, number of barriers that impeded progress; these will be addressed in our forward-looking action plan. We reviewed the value and utility of a 'researcher charter' and recognized that alternative directions such as the development of a Hull Research Culture Action Plan would be more effective and in line with sector norms. Our mandatory training participation targets were set at 100% compliance, which were, on reflection, unrealistic and unachievable particularly in the absence of SMART methodology across the 2022-2024 plan. Furthermore, our plan was predicated on researchers and managers holding career development meetings and allocating a minimum of 10 days of continuous professional development (CPD). Our review has highlighted a distinct lack of career conversations and awareness of the CPD entitlement. Budgetary constraints were a significant factor in the review period, dedicated support for researcher development diminished substantially leading to a diminution in project coordination, data analysis, and oversight. The introduction of the RCRD team and an explicit commitment at the university leadership team (ULT) to researcher development, provides positive impetus, expertise, and a strong foundation for our 2024-2027 ambitions.

Strategic objectives

To deliver on our researcher development ambitions, the University commenced a formal consultation to shape a Hull Research Culture Action Plan in November 2023 with a proposed action plan launch in April 2024. Our strategic vision will set the direction of travel, priorities, and research culture, employment, and development objectives through to 2030. Our research culture action plan and ongoing developments will be informed by important external priorities including the independent 2023 Nurse review³, with an emphasis on culture, diversity and the permeability of people, ideas, and skills and the Vitae Research Culture Framework⁴. Within this context, the forward-looking action plan, 2024-2027, reflects our emergent research culture, employment and development priorities, and previous actions where we want to continue to make progress.

Environment and Culture	Development of a Hull research culture action plan , to be launched in April 2024, will establish tone, direction, and success indicators. Developed with, and for, our research community the plan will cover all aspects of our desired research environment and culture.
	Researchers will be supported to complete research integrity training within 1 month of their appointment. We are extending automatic reminders and creating data dashboards from which compliance can be monitored effectively.
	Social justice and inclusion is a key pillar of our institutional strategy with multiple reporting forums. We have established clear governance so that the cross-cutting themes and actions arising from our broader charter commitments are considered and synergies identified.
Employment	We are embarking on phase 2 of an institutional HR policy review . In consultation with stakeholders, we will improve the recruitment, induction, and onboarding experience of new and returning researchers, providing support and guidance to research managers.
	Our new health and wellbeing team will conclude their institutional review, capturing the views and experiences of all staff groups with the aim of streamlining access to services and mental health support.
	Automation of existing processes is ongoing, enabling researchers and managers to share information quickly. The introduction of the Enterprise Resource Planning tool in 2025 will include digitisation of career development reviews, appraisal, CPD, and sickness absence reporting.
Professional and Career Development	Development of career development review guidance, training and support is due to start in spring 2024. Consultation with researchers and research managers, and a pilot project will run concurrently with the planned review of budget allocation.
	We will enhance understanding of, and access to, continuous professional development activity for all researchers and research managers through improved communications, digital resources, tailored guidance, and real-time data reporting.

The success of our 3-year key objectives, as defined in the 2024-2027 action plan, is dependent on engagement, support, and contributions from researchers at all career stages, research managers, principal investigators, and senior managers and leaders. We will monitor progress, providing KPI data and flagging areas of concern through CSG and URC and will hold owners to account for their individual and collective areas of responsibility.

³2023 Independent Review of the UK's Research, Development and Innovation Organisational Landscape, Sir Paul Nurse.

⁴ Created to map and categorise research culture initiatives for the UKRI State of the Nation on Research Culture