



HR Excellence in Research Award (HR EiR) 10-year review and report

Introduction and Background

Lancaster University first received the European HR Excellence in Research Award (HR EiR) in 2011. Since the 2019 submission there have been, and continues to be, considerable changes to the senior leadership team within the Institution with the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellors.

The past two years have been as impactful at Lancaster as elsewhere, but the institution has carried on teaching, research, and knowledge exchange activities throughout, including the launch of its new Institutional Strategic Plan for 2021-2026. With a primary goal *'to consolidate Lancaster University's status as a leading global research-intensive university.'* This new strategy maintains a significant focus on research and the researcher community and culture, underpinned by the new institutional values:

- We **respect each other** by being open and fair and promoting diversity
- We **build strong communities** by working effectively together in a supportive way
- We **create positive change** by being ambitious in our learning, expertise and action

For context, Lancaster currently has 3560 staff (1130 Academic and Research roles) (393 Research only roles – 372 indefinite and 21 fixed term). 1800 PGR (postgraduate researcher students) are supported by the Doctoral Academy and are currently out of scope for the Action Plan. Work is underway to draw the two work streams closer together and to share good practice. A similar partnership has evolved between HR EiR and Athena Swan (AS). With a member of the AS team represented on the Concordat Implementation Group (CIG), this has a mutual beneficial impact with a broader reach and joint credibility. The institution has encouraged the setting up of a range of staff networks (Parents and Carers, LGBTQ, Womens', Young staff, Disabled Employee) these, along with the Research Staff Association (RSA), are being consulted widely on issues such as the new People & Culture plan, the Institutional values and strategy and have played a part in supporting staff through the pandemic.

Further investment in the research environment has seen the completion of the Health Innovation Campus, which offers a unique opportunity for Lancaster's researchers to work with other industry and private sector partners on important health challenges. This increased the multidisciplinary Research Institutes at Lancaster to six. The library has been extended offering a dedicated researcher space, which will provide physical, digitally equipped spaces, for the library to co-deliver researcher development activity and to be a hub for researchers to meet and collaborate.

Concordat progress, evaluation, and governance

Progress against the HR EiR action plan has continued throughout the two-year period through the Concordat Implementation Group. Chaired by the Director of People and Organisational Effectiveness, core members are four research staff, one from each faculty, (RSA Executive members). Other members include staff from Organisational Development; Research Services Office; Library; Careers Service; Athena Swan; three Associate Deans for Research; and EDI (and other HR professionals as appropriate). This group meets every other month to assess progress against the current Action Plan, receive updates from across the institution on activities to support researchers and to coordinate further initiatives, to support our researcher community. This plan followed a RAG rating scheme to enable the group to maintain momentum in all areas. CIG is an action group, reporting directly to the Institutional Research Committee, chaired by the Pro VC for Research, this committee provides oversight and strategic input and is a subcommittee of Senate.



Community engagement, research population and key stakeholders

Engaging directly with the research population is of paramount importance, so that researchers' concerns can be raised within the Institution. Data gathering and information sharing has been undertaken throughout the two years, and increased during the Pandemic, using a range of sources, activities, and a variety of media:

- The RSA executive has regular contact with the broader research representative network (whose members sit on Departmental Research and other committees). Themes and concerns raised by the reps are communicated at CIG meetings, by the four researcher members.
- RSA regular networking sessions, for all researchers (currently fortnightly, online).
- Broader feedback from Researcher workshops and development activities.
- University Pulse Surveys - included questions on wellbeing, home working and return to work issues.
- CEDARS survey 2020 and 2021. A comparator report looked at both sets of data and highlighted key areas for further analysis and discussion at the focus groups.
- Presentation and discussion at Faculty, Department and University level research committees.
- Interactive session for the University Leadership Group (ULG).

Focus groups, attended by a range of researchers and research managers from all faculties, explored the data gathered by the Pulse and CEDARS surveys and other feedback from research staff, enabling us to identify and clarify the areas of most concern for our research population and to focus our action plan on these areas. For example: streamlining processes; understanding policies and best practice for promotion; practical issues such as, 'managing research projects'; and the quality of Performance Development Review (PDR) discussions. These outputs directly influenced the direction of the new action plan and the themes for further activity and focus by CIG. Once we were confident that a broad range of researchers had been included in the creation of the new action plan, a follow up session was undertaken with ULG to introduce the new concordat principals and to instil a sense of ownership and responsibility across the institution.

In direct response to some pressing issues raised by the researcher community through a report compiled by the RSA, a 'priority actions' approach has highlighted themes for immediate attention, details in Action Plan:

- *Researcher Identity* – Agreed nomenclature – a clearer understanding of how various categories of research staff might describe themselves and consistent use of these across the institution
- *Researcher Voice* - ensuring researchers are always integrated into Departmental and Faculty communications and activities.
- *Equity and consistency* - Consistency in application of policies e.g., funding for conferences and development, across all faculties and departments.

Achievements and Review of progress since 2019 – summary of key priorities

Raise the EDI agenda

- By including AS colleague on CIG and drawing the two action plans into parallel this has given both agendas a new impetus and greater traction.
- Researchers are now represented on strategic committees and were included in focus groups looking at the new University Values and People & Culture plan.

Reinforce Principal Investigator responsibilities as leaders and managers of research staff

- Development options were moved online and focused on PIs managing teams remotely. The programme also covered responsibilities of PGR supervision. All were booked up.

- Satisfaction rates (measured through CEDARS) focusing on management and research leadership showed an upturn in positive responses.

Transparency of promotional routes and procedures, internal policies, and processes.

New promotion policies now in place, with researchers and research leaders on all the focus groups. Three clear routes available, Research, Teaching and Engagement with leadership running through all three. These are supported by clearer guidance and easier access to promotional activities. The processes were introduced to the broader researcher community at a week-long promotions event in September 21.

Foundation of good practice and development of alternative career pathways for researchers

The Prosper Project partnership with Liverpool and Manchester, (developing skills for alternative career destinations) launched in 2020 and is entering its final pilot phase; early responses have been overwhelmingly positive and will bring a wealth of opportunity to the research population.

Enhance Lancaster's practices re. recruitment, retention & development of research staff

Most research staff were moved from fixed term to indefinite (subject to funding) contracts, which offers greater stability and equity with other staff. It is acknowledged that these are not permanent positions, as they remain dependent on funding. The redeployment process has been improved, during the pandemic staff were placed on the redeployment register for up to 6 months, prior to their proposed funding end dates.

Lancaster continues to offer a broad range of researcher development activities, workshops, and programmes to support the research community at any stage of their careers and are piloting a new cross institutional mentoring scheme for mid-career researchers, with MMU, Salford, Liverpool, and Huddersfield. If successful, we are looking to broaden the reach to include several other institutions.

COVID response

Lancaster moved most of its UG and PGT teaching, and staff development provision online. The pressure on the research environment led to increased demand for specific sessions, notably Principal Investigator (PI) and PGR supervision sessions. We doubled the capacity of each session and doubled the number of instances they ran, whilst retaining excellent feedback. A hybrid model has been developed for the future, working with feedback received from colleagues based both in the UK and overseas. This flexible approach to delivery has proved popular and family friendly, allowing for a broader range of attendees, particularly from the researcher communities.

Strategy for the next two years

As the University shifts its focus from its response to COVID, CIG will be proactive in understanding the experiences of research teams as they seek to make up for any lost time. The leadership and management of these teams, through transition and beyond, will be paramount, and the OD programmes will reflect this.

Engagement and broadening reach and impact will be more firmly in focus. Ensuring ethical working practices and safe and welcoming working environments will be key. Embedding the new values and understanding and sharing the new university strategy and vision will be underpinned by a Research Culture review, helping to understand where further improvements need to be made, sharing good practice, and working across the institution to embed the new policies.

At a practical level, ensuring research staff get the 10 development days that they are entitled to, needs a mechanism to help track and monitor this activity. We will ensure these days are of real value to the individual researcher's professional and career development and that a wide range of opportunities are available.

Lancaster has recently signed the Race Equality Charter and so new activities will be added to the forward action plan in response to this.

Glossary of Terms

AS (AP) – Athena Swan Action Plan

CEDARS – Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey

EDI – Equality Diversity and Inclusion

HoDs – Heads of Department

HRBP – Human Resources Business Partners

HR EIR – HR Excellence in Research

MMU – Manchester Metropolitan University

OD Organisational Development

PGR – Post Graduate Researcher

PGT – Post Graduate Taught

PI – Principal investigator

POED – People and Organisational Effectiveness Division

RAG – Red, Amber and Green, colour system to identify areas for concern.

RES – Research Enterprise Services

RSA – Research Staff association

RSO – Research Services Office

UG – Undergraduate

ULG – University Leadership Group