

## University of Reading HR Excellence in Research 2020 - 2022 Summary Report

### 1. Context

At Reading we have a thriving and diverse community of researchers and foster an environment and culture that enables excellent research. The principles of the Concordat for Researcher Development are embedded in our University Research & Innovation Strategy (2019), from recruiting to supporting and retaining the best researchers at all career stages. We reward research excellence through promotion and awards and invest in the development of our researchers through training, mentoring, support and communities of practice. We typically have 320 - 350 fixed term research staff at any one time, with over one third within one School. Roles are primarily research based, spanning Research Assistants/ Associates/ Scientists, Post-Doctoral Research Assistants and Research Fellows.

Our Research and Innovation Strategy shapes our institutional research priorities, our research and engagement culture, and the way we lead, manage and deliver our research. To encourage interdisciplinary working, our research is aggregated into four themes (Agriculture, Food and Health; Environment; Heritage and Creativity; and Prosperity and Resilience), each with leadership provided by a Research Dean. We are fortunate to have dedicated funds from the Research Endowment Trust Fund (~£1.2M p.a.) and our National Institute for Research into Dairying Trust Fund (£1-2M p.a.) to support initiatives that enhance our research culture and permit investment in staff and facilities. Empowering our researchers to develop as research leaders within their areas of expertise is the foundation of the vitality, sustainability and quality of our research.

This summary highlights the University's progress towards embedding a culture of researcher development across the three principal areas: environment and culture; employment and professional & career development. This summary has been considered and approved by the University Executive Board and University Council.

### 2. Governance

The University Board for Research and Innovation provides governance and oversight of all research-related activity. It oversees the work of all research committees and reports to the University Senate. Research is led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Research and Innovation, Parveen Yaqoob and Dominik Zaum, a job share (as indeed are our PVCs for Teaching and Learning, and 2 of the 4 Research Deans) which demonstrates deep institutional commitment to broaden opportunities for staff and leadership development. Research governance is illustrated at: [Research governance \(reading.ac.uk\)](https://www.reading.ac.uk/research-governance).

A key element of this structure is that academic staff (including research staff) can apply for dedicated positions on all research-related committees and thereby contribute to decision making, improving transparency and dissemination and communication. In addition, the Chair of the University Research Staff Committee\* is automatically a member of the University Board for Research & Innovation (the highest-level committee in the structure). This position is currently vacant and being recruited to as part of the drive to reinvigorate the researcher community post-Covid. As part of the changes in governance structure, the

University Postgraduate Research Studies Committee developed into a new Researcher Development and Postgraduate Research Studies Committee, with expanded terms of reference.

Our PVC (R&I) remains overall sponsor for HREiR but since August 2021, the Dean of PGR Studies and Researcher Development has responsibility for leading the implementation of the Concordat. Progress is overseen by the Committee for Researcher Development and PGR Studies (12 members in total), chaired by the Dean and reporting to the University Committee and Board for Research and Innovation. Progress in implementing the Concordat is now a standing item on the agenda of both committees. Day-to-day HREiR action plan work is led by the Researcher Development Project Officer (RDPO).

\*The Research Staff Committee has not been active over the last two years following the departure of the Chair. Re-establishing the committee is a high priority for 2022/23 and new models and membership are currently being assessed.

### **3. Evaluation and consultation**

The 2020-22 Action Plan progress was evaluated using several tools. Firstly, the biennial Careers, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) results from June 2021 provided numeric indicators for many of the measures of progress. This has been supplemented with input from HR Partners and services such as Occupational Health and People Development. Targets set in 2020 'set the scene' for the ambition of the work and will be benchmarks for future progress. Traditionally, the CEDARS response rate at Reading is good, with more than half of research staff responding in the past. However, the June 2021 return of 90 responses was lower than normal with approximately a quarter of staff responding. Covid and changes to work patterns are likely contributors to this decline.

Additional evidence for reporting has been gathered from consulting directly via email and phone calls with research staff, especially those nominated as leads for diversity, equality and inclusion and eliciting examples of best practise from across the Schools. The HR Business Partners, Occupational Health, People Development and Research Services colleagues have all provided support and information in this submission.

### **4. Summary and key achievements 2020-2022**

All priority actions from the 2020-22 action plan have been achieved or are in progress. There have been significant changes to the leadership of, and support for, researcher development. Professor Williams was appointed to the role of Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies and Researcher Development in August 2021. A Researcher Development Project Officer was appointed in March 2022 (0.6 FTE for 3 years) to work with HR colleagues and research staff and provides a dedicated resource to progress the next action plan. These changes recognise the importance of researcher development and the drive to enhance research culture across both our University and the wider sector.

***Main achievements over the past two years:*****ENVIRONMENT & CULTURE**

- A Concordat Essentials Guide has been produced and circulated to all research staff and their managers.
- A guide for supporting the mental wellbeing of research staff has been written and circulated to PIs and other managers of researchers.
- Fifteen research staff volunteered to be Research Integrity Champions and completed a training course to become qualified to deliver Virt2ue Research Integrity training; research integrity remains a key component of our research strategy and training is currently being rolled out across Schools.
- Opportunities have arisen to allow Research Development Leads to join the University's Diversity and Inclusion Community of Practice group to support the sharing of good practices with colleagues across Schools.

**EMPLOYMENT**

- New web pages have been designed and implemented, with three main sections aimed at i) research staff ii) PIs and other managers of researchers, and iii) the Researcher Development Concordat. These supporting resources are now more visible, having been dramatically streamlined and moved, ensuring all relevant information for researchers is one place.
- No cases of research misconduct have been reported over the last two years.
- Over 75% of research staff participated in a staff development review over the last two years.
- The University's Merit Based Promotion Committee has approved 19 out of 20 nominations (7 male; 12 female) for promotion under the 'rewarding excellence scheme' (accelerated progression up their salary scale or nominated for promotion).

**PROFESSIONAL & CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

- An online induction module for new research staff and managers has been developed. The associated induction checklist has also been updated and circulated. This will help to ensure new and existing staff are fully aware of the support and resources available to enable them to flourish in their role and in their career.
- A Guide for 'Careers beyond Academia' has been produced by an external consultant during 2021. Also, a link to the career planning toolkit is contained within research staff web pages and the research staff induction module.
- The Researcher Development Programme content and format has been reviewed. Further consultation will take place ahead of the new academic year to identify gaps in our current provision and finalise the programme.
- Initiatives aimed at research managers and leaders, such as 'Mental Health Skills for Managers' workshop, are ongoing.
- Four new development courses have been delivered by external experts following a staff survey. This also led to discussions between our Communications team and Knowledge Partnership staff, who are currently developing additional in-house courses linked to different stages in the life cycle of a researcher.
- A new training module for PIs and other managers of researchers has been written and is currently being implemented in the training system.

## 5. Future strategy – HREiR 2022-25 Action Plan

The new Researcher Development Project Officer (RDPO) post will drive forward the delivery of actions to co-ordinate and improve the researcher development offer available to staff. Having this dedicated resource working with staff across the University will improve our understanding of where gaps exist and where greater support at researcher or research manager level, is required. Re-establishing engagement among the research community is the highest priority to ensure that the researchers' voice is captured in forward planning for the next three years. The RDPO role also provides an opportunity to network with other HEI's and draw on their experience, to trial new tools such as Prosper (University of Liverpool) and to learn lessons and best practice shared through Vitae events.

### ENVIRONMENT & CULTURE

- Re-establish the Research Staff Committee (high).
- Outline an ongoing programme of regular informal social events for staff to network across Schools (high).
- Link Concordat principles into existing communities of practices and services, such as Research Services, Research Culture Cafes (high).
- Celebrate researchers with an annual Reading Researchers event (medium).

### EMPLOYMENT

- Continue to roll out induction modules for managers and staff (medium).
- Work with HR to incorporate Personal Development Reviews as a conditional part of probation/contract management (low).
- Work with HR and Occupational Health on improvements for recording and monitoring relevant HREiR actions allowing trends/metrics for research staff to be reported in a more informative manner in 2025 (medium/low).

### PROFESSIONAL & CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- Trial one-one appointments with an external career development advisor (Spring term 2022/23) and continue to roll-out each year if successful.
- Invite research staff to identify training gaps and needs to enhance the Learning & Development programme (ongoing) to help shape future professional development and training opportunities.
- Explore opportunities to work with internal partners, such as the Careers Service and Knowledge Transfer Partnership, to extend opportunities beyond students to include research staff (low).