

Ten-year self-assessment for the HR Excellence in Research Award (September 2021)

The University of Bath received the HR Excellence in Research Award in September 2011 and has retained it since. The full list of completed actions and progress made since 2019 and the action plan for 2019–2021 are published on the [HR Excellence in Research Award webpages](#). This award is now mapped to the revised (2019) [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers \(Researcher Development Concordat\)](#), which the University of Bath signed in January 2020. The Researcher Development Action Plan 2019–22 was approved by the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (URKEC) in March 2021 and is published on the [HR Excellence in Research Award webpages](#).

The values underlying [University of Bath Strategy 2021–26](#) align with the three Researcher Development Concordat principles, which recognises the importance of research staff (RS) and their role in the University of Bath community, and the importance of creating a positive research culture where everyone feels heard:

- **Principle 1, Environment and culture:** excellent research requires a supportive and inclusive research culture (**Supporting** and **Fostering**)
- **Principle 2, Employment:** researchers are recruited, employed and managed under conditions that recognise and value their contributions (**Nurturing**)
- **Principle 3, Professional and career development:** professional and career development are integral to enabling researchers to develop their full potential (**Delivering** and **Aspiring**)

Additionally, these principles align with the **driving high impact research** and **fostering and outstanding and inclusive community** strategic pillars. Therefore, the retention of this award *via* the implementation of its action plan is an external driver that can support the implementation of the university strategy.

With these in mind, we are committed to recruiting, retaining, and developing diverse and talented RS across the university. This HR Excellence in Research Award action plan is one initiative that supports our intentions, together with the institutional Silver Athena SWAN (AS) action plan (2021) and departmental action plans, [Research Strategy](#), and [Vision for Research Staff](#).

Process of Internal Review

The responsibility for implementation of the strategy lies with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) (PVCR) and is supported by the [Research Staff Working Group \(RSWG\)](#). Annual reports with progress and recommendations from the action plan are formally reviewed by the URKEC, which is chaired by the PVCR.

Progress on the action plan is informally reviewed with regular meetings between the Researcher Development Manager and Departmental Research Staff Coordinators (DRSCs). Additionally, RS provide feedback on progress at Departmental Research Staff Network and RSWG meetings, and actions are added as and when they arise. The Researcher Development Manager also attends Faculty Research Committees at least once a year to review updates on actions and gain feedback on any initiatives or local issues that have arisen. In 2020 and 2021, views of RS and managers of RS were sought *via* the Culture, Employability and Development of Academic Researchers Survey (CEDARS) The results of CEDARS are published *via* internal communication channels and reviewed by the URKEC and RSWG. The next CEDARS will take place in 2023. Furthermore, RS views will be sought in the biennial institutional AS survey and as part of departmental AS surveys.

Major stakeholders, such as Human Resources (HR), Research & Innovation Services (RIS), Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), and Heads of Department (HoDs) are regularly consulted on their progress towards the action plan by the Researcher Development Manager, DRSCs, and RSWG.

Progress Since 2011 and Reflections

Since first gaining the HR Excellence in Research Award in 2011, continuous improvement has been made to the way in which we support RS to make the most out of their time here at Bath. A main focus of the actions during this time has been on improving and establishing processes as well as offering development opportunities. The previous HR Excellence in Research action plan was mapped to the original (2008) Researcher Development Concordat; therefore, the following section highlights these improvements in relation to those principles. We completed a gap analysis for the

revised Researcher Development Concordat in 2020 and have used this revised document to create our 2019-22 Concordat Action Plan and 2021-23 HR Excellence in Research Action Plan.

Feedback indicates that initiatives to improve the **Recruitment & Selection** process were successful. For example, there has been a significant increase in the number of RS who reported being offered a departmental-level induction (82%) in 2021 compared with 56% in 2019. This is overseen at the departmental level by DRSCs.

We have made further progress in implementing Principle 2: **Recognition & Value**. We have supported the piloting of new guidance in one department for RS applying for Co-I status on externally funded grants, to help provide formal recognition for the role of senior RS in the development and management of research projects. Clearer institutional guidance is being developed as a priority action (see **Strategy 2021–23** below). However, CEDARS showed that RS are less likely to believe that promotion and progression processes are fair, and most managers of RS feel that they are not recognised for all their contributions to research excellence. Therefore, we are prioritising the introduction of more transparent promotion criteria that recognise contributions to the career development and leadership of others, and other collegiality roles across all academic levels.

We introduced an Outstanding Performance of RS in 2019 ([Peter Troughton prize](#), previously the Ede & Ravenscroft prize). Since 2019, we have had 10–15 nominations per year across all faculties. We continue to work towards ensuring that RS feel a valued part of the community: we have a permanent RS member on the University RKEC and there is RS representation on relevant departmental committees, including research, health and safety, and ED, in 13 out of 16 departments. Additionally, there is RS representation on the Athena Swan University Self-Assessment Team and Climate Action Framework Research Sub-Group.

Support & Career Development continues to be a key area of focus. We support the career aspirations of RS with our highly successful career and leadership development programmes, such as Academic Career Academy and Leadership in Action (for details, see below). A new system of ‘Career Conversations’ was piloted in departments in 2019 and, following positive feedback, is now used as an annual appraisal process for all academic staff (including RS) in the Faculty of Science and over half the departments in Faculty Engineering and Design. However, CEDARS 2021 highlighted that RS are still much less likely to participate in career development review (25%), but more likely to find it useful (75%). Furthermore, only 26% report having a clear career development plan. Therefore, we are focusing on the way that career conversations are undertaken with RS and how we can support RS to reflect on their career plan from contract start to contract end in the 2021-23 action plan. While RS report being well-managed overall, CEDARS 2021 showed that nearly half of the managers of RS are not confident in dealing with poor performance. Therefore, we are developing additional support for managers focused on their performance as managers as well as on managing performance.

Significant progress has been made in **Equality & Diversity**. The number of our departmental AS awards has increased to 17, with an increase from 2 to 6 silver awards, making us one of the most highly awarded HEIs in the country regarding the Gender Equality Charter Mark. Additionally, we have recently submitted our institutional Silver AS award application (2021) and the University has appointed a Head of the Race Equality Taskforce who will lead our commitments to race equality and oversee their effective implementation.

Key Achievements and Progress Since 2019

These achievements have been grouped according to the 2019 Researcher Development Concordat principles. Our key achievements reflect the university’s values, in particular in **Fostering** and **Aspiring**, which link to our progress in EDI and the professional development of researchers.

Environment and Culture

- The number of our departmental AS awards has increased to 17, with an increase from 2 to 6 silver awards, making us one of the most highly awarded HEIs in the country regarding the Gender Equality Charter Mark.
- We have been successful in obtaining an Institutional AS Silver Award in 2021.
- Most RS and managers (82% and 78%, respectively) agree that the university promotes the highest standards of research integrity and conduct.
- Most RS (74%) agree that the University actively promotes the importance of good mental health and wellbeing of staff.
- There is RS representation on relevant departmental committees, including research, health and safety, and EDI, in 13 out of 16 departments. Additionally, there is RS representation on the Athena Swan University Self-Assessment Team and Climate Action Framework Research Sub-Group.

- The RSWG continues to increase its membership to ensure RS representation across the university. All faculties are now represented by at least two RS members, and three out of the top four departments with the highest numbers of RS are now represented.
- RS networks have continued or been created in Departments of Biology & Biochemistry and Chemistry, Department for Health, and across the Faculty of Engineering and Design. These networks have hosted social activities and career-focused events throughout 2020-21.
- RS continue to be recognised for their contribution to the university *via* the Peter Troughton prize (previously the Ede & Ravenscroft prize). Since 2019, we have 10–15 nominations per year across all faculties.

Employment

- There is a significant increase in the number of RS who reported being offered a departmental-level induction (82%) in 2021 compared with 56% in 2019. This is overseen at the departmental level by DRSCs.

Professional and Career Development

- Fortnightly *Research Staff News* newsletter provides all RS with professional development opportunities, including information about funding opportunities, workshops and events, and relevant policies. This is opened by >90% of RS.
- The Academic Career Academy continues to prepare RS for a lectureship position. Since 2017, 66 RS have attended this programme, inclusive of the current 2021 cohort. Of those researchers who have completed the Academy, 42% have obtained a lectureship position or independent fellowship, with 9 being promoted at University of Bath.
- In response to CEDARS 2020, where 71% of RS stated a desire to undertake leadership training, we offered 12 places on Leadership in Action, an intensive, experiential leadership programme for early career researchers, in collaboration with King's College London, University College London, Queen's University Belfast, and Queen Mary University of London. The feedback from this was excellent, with researchers reflecting on their current leadership strengths and how to develop these within their role, and creating a leadership goal that helped them with their career development. This has led to the development of a collaboration with Universities of Exeter and Cardiff, which will begin in 2021, as a GW4 Leadership in Action programme.
- We have continued to support RS to obtain a qualification in project management; in 2020-21, 27 RS have undertaken all or part of the 23-h training required in preparation for their qualification exam.
- In addition to the ongoing offer of careers guidance appointments, the Researcher Career Development Adviser has been running monthly 'drop-in' sessions for RS throughout 2020-21, particularly focusing on careers planning during/after COVID19. These have received excellent feedback. Further, 61% of RS are now registered with the Careers Service system.

Strategy 2021-23

A new action plan for 2021-23 has been created in consultation with the relevant stakeholders and was approved by University Executive Board in September 2021. We will update and review the action plan regularly and add new actions in line with university and national priorities and strategies. The plan has been developed by the RSWG in consultation with the PVC, HR, RIS, and ED. RS views were used to inform the action plan *via* CEDARS and RS networks. The URKEC was consulted on the strategic priorities in June 2021 and the University Executive Board has approved the 10-y Progress Report and Action Plan 2021-23.

Key strategic aims in the 2021-23 action plan are **(1)** building a more inclusive and connected community of RS that are integrated into the university; **(2)** improving the career progression for RS within and beyond University of Bath; and **(3)** championing the management of RS. Priority actions for these aims are:

(1) Creating sustainable RS networks across all faculties

(2) Establish working group to make recommendations to improve the career progression of researchers and reduce the use of FTC for these roles

(3) Celebrate good management practice using RS and managers' voices in case studies

All actions, mapped to the 2019 Researcher Development Concordat, are outlined in the Action Plan 2021–23.