



HR Excellence in Research Award

Loughborough University Self-Assessment

2020-2022

Institutional Context

Loughborough University is a research-intensive institution with exceptional Research Excellence Framework (REF) results. In 2021, 100% eligible staff were returned (top 30 by overall GPA) and > 90% of research submitted was classified as ‘world-leading’ or ‘internationally-excellent’: one of the largest increases in the sector since REF 2014.

The University is led by the Vice-Chancellor, who is supported by an executive team comprising the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, three Pro Vice-Chancellors (Education and Student Experience; Research and Innovation; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion), Chief Operating Officer, and Chief Financial Officer. There are nine Schools each led by a Dean and supported by Associate Deans (AD) who match the PVC portfolios. The ADs connect School Senior Management Teams to PVC-chaired institution-wide committees. Strategic links are reinforced by the University Leadership Group and the University Executive Board. The Associate PVC (Doctoral College) provides strategic leadership for the development of doctoral researchers, including their transition into research or alternative careers.

A new University Strategy, [Creating Better Futures. Together](#), launched in March 2022, places significant emphasis on partnership working and research stating we will be ‘**more ambitious in our research and innovation endeavour**’ as one of the six core aims. A key aspect of our strategy is to create ‘**an environment where interdisciplinary research and innovation teams can flourish and ensure that Loughborough University is anti-discriminatory, diverse, and inclusive**’. This focus places the researcher experience and therefore the Concordat action plan, at the heart of the implementation of the University Strategy.

Loughborough University has c800 Research, Teaching, and Innovation Staff and c1400 doctoral researchers. Our commitment to the Concordat is focused on c300 research staff (i.e., those on research-only contracts such as Assistants, Associates, Senior Associates and Fellows). This is because we recognise that research staff have differing needs and experiences to other populations that warrant careful consideration and actions.

Loughborough University aims to provide sector-leading support to research staff at all levels through structured programmes within a welcoming and dynamic research community. For example, on an annual basis, [Doctoral Prize Fellowships](#) are offered to excellent researchers within two years of PhD completion. Furthermore, in 2021, the University established [C-DICE](#) (Centre for Postdoctoral Development in Infrastructure Cities and Energy); the largest single investment in postdoctoral development in the UK, due to a £4m investment from Research England, and £3.4m in matched funding from university and industry partners.

Internal Evaluation

In addition to research staff, key stakeholders from the following services and Schools were consulted in the internal evaluation of the action plan:

Departments and External Bodies	All nine Schools, including Associate Deans (Research and Innovation)
Careers Network (Student Services)	Aeronautical, Automotive, Chemical and Materials Engineering
Centre for Post-Doctoral Development in Infrastructure Cities and Energy (C-DICE)	Architecture Building and Civil Engineering
Energy Research Accelerator (ERA)	Design and Creative Arts
Enhanced Academic Practice	Loughborough Business School

Departments and External Bodies	All nine Schools, including Associate Deans (Research and Innovation)
Health and Safety	Sport Exercise and Health Sciences
Human Resources	Social Sciences and Humanities
Institute of Advance Studies (IAS)	Science
Library	Mechanical, Electrical and Manufacturing Engineering
Planning Office	London
Organisational Development	
Research and Innovation Office (RIO)	

Mechanism to Evaluate Progress

The 2021-22 Action Plan was disseminated across all above groups for progress updates and forward planning. It was also discussed at the Research and Innovation Committee in June 2022 and members were asked to report progress.

During the evaluation process, researchers' views were considered via survey responses, including the 2021 Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) which had a response rate of 27% (n=82) of research-only respondents. Final oversight was provided by the PVC (Research and Innovation), Director of RIO, Head of Enhanced Academic Practice, and Director of Organisational Development. Where complementarity exists, linkages are made between the Concordat and other relevant initiatives to ensure that the agenda supporting Researcher Development is embedded, for example in work towards Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter.

Governance Structures

The implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan is undertaken through two main University Committees: Research and Innovation Committee (RIC) and Human Resources Committee (HRC).

The RIC acts in an executive and advisory capacity on all matters related to research in accordance with the current Strategic Plan. Membership pertinent to the scrutiny of researcher development comprises the following key personnel:

- PVC Research and Innovation
- Director, Research and Innovation Office
- Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (Doctoral College)
- Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (Research Excellence Framework)
- Head of Researcher Development
- Head of Enhanced Academic Practice
- All nine School Associate Deans (Research and Innovation).

The HRC remit centres on the development, approval and monitoring of HR strategy and policy, including the recruitment, reward, retention, motivation and development of the University's staff. Membership includes both the Director of HR and the Director of Organisational Development and Change. This Committee is therefore able to track and monitor progress against specific career development actions.

RIC and HRC membership is reviewed annually and it has been agreed that it will now include a research-only staff member.

Past Progress and Achievements

In November 2022, it became clear to the new team involved with the HREiR action plan that there had been limited institutional formal monitoring and tracking of the 2021-22 Action Plan. This resulted in us not being able to evidence progress and impact against several actions. To improve matters, formal structures (as outlined above) are now in place to ensure that the 2023-2026 Action Plan is regularly reviewed. We recognise that stagnation in structures hindered inclusion of the 'researcher voice' in our reporting of progress. This has now been addressed through numerous mechanisms including the re-institution of the Loughborough University Research Staff Association and, research staff representation on the RIC and HRC. In addition, the formation of working groups linked to each Concordat obligation will ensure closer scrutiny of progress and greater consultation with key stakeholders. Ultimately, we acknowledge that there continues to be much to achieve and the new team involved in leading this important work are committed to making significant progress towards the 2023-2026 Action Plan as evidenced in the actions already implemented since January 2023 and available to view on the [Research Staff webpages](#). Despite a lack of overall progress towards the 2021-22 Action Plan, the following sections detail progress made against the previous Action Plan.

Environment and Culture

The introduction of dynamic working provides the opportunity for all staff to work flexibly, determining their own work patterns. This resulted in a positive CEDAR 2021 outcome with 93% of research staff respondents agreeing that they would expect to be treated fairly when making requests for flexible working.

The recent annual Loughborough University Research Conference attracted c300 attendees in-person and/or online (increase of 33% from the prior year) with 83% of pulse survey respondents (response rate = 17%) stating it had provided them with an opportunity to share research and network with others, and 94% agreeing that it provided an inclusive environment within which to listen, engage and learn. In addition, there was a significant increase in the number of research staff who showcased their work compared to the previous year's conference (10 vs. 1 person, respectively).

There have been increased opportunities for research staff to access mentoring support including a structured programme of mentoring and training for all UK Young Academy applicants. In total, nine research-only staff benefited from this development opportunity and four LU academics became founding members; the highest representation of any university and demonstrating the quality of support provided for all. Furthermore, Loughborough has led on significant partnerships in researcher skills and employability, including leading the cross-cutting skills element of the ERA, which supports researchers from eight universities, and C-DICE.

C-DICE

Established at Loughborough University in 2021, C-DICE brings together 18 UK Higher Educational Institutions and industry partners, in addition to other stakeholders such as Vitae. The Centre is innovating new, bespoke development opportunities and through the impact hub led by Loughborough University, is building the evidence base for how to best support and sustain the postdoctoral community from all disciplines. There are 474 researchers registered with C-DICE from 18 partners, and they have engaged with 332 days-worth of professional development in the past two years. There are 121 Loughborough researchers registered, receiving £29k in funding and 72 days-worth of development in this period. Excitingly, following a competitive application process, Loughborough University and C-DICE will be co-hosting the National Postdoc Conference in

September 2023. For further information about C-DICE, please see the case study on the Research Staff webpages.

Employment

83% of research staff engaged with the internal appraisal process, and of those who engaged, there are some positive reflections on its usefulness to career development. Whilst 43% indicated that Loughborough offers equitable opportunities for career progression, we recognise there is more work to be done in this area as reflected in our forwards action plan.

53% of research staff (CEDARS 2021 data) indicate that their School based induction was specifically about research. Therefore, this action will be carried forward into the updated plan to ensure that all new research staff are inducted into their School and receive essential information related to their role.

Professional and Career Development

The development of the Organisational Development Hub provides a one-stop-shop for research staff to access developmental opportunities. Researchers make good use of this to book onto development sessions (e.g. Belonging and Inclusion; Coaching Mentoring and Buddying; Developing and Leading People; Mental Health and Wellbeing; Project Management; Research and Innovation). The numbers of staff attending sessions over the past two years stands at 189 representing 63% of the research-only staff community.

Loughborough's HR Excellence in Research Action Plan focusses primarily on the community of around 300 research-only staff, and in the region of 800 Research, Teaching and Innovation staff. Therefore, there are many wider opportunities available to research staff not fully captured here, through both Organisational Development, RIO and Doctoral College initiatives. This is further supported through cross institutional networks such as the C-DICE, ERA and the Institute of Advance Studies.

Strategic Objectives and Implementation Plan

Our priorities over the next cycle are as follows:

Environment and Culture

Loughborough University is committed to supporting and enhancing a rich and dynamic research environment where all those involved with research thrive. One of our core strategic aims: **We will be more diverse, equitable and inclusive**, underpins many of the obligations set out in the action plan. Specifically, two elements of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) core plan:

- We will work together to create an inclusive, fair and respectful culture in which all staff and students feel valued, are able to voice differing perspectives and realise their full potential.
- We will honestly and openly identify, dismantle, and redesign our policies, processes and structures to embed and assure anti-discriminatory practice and outcomes

will drive our activity in meeting the following actions: EC12; EC16; ECR1. Success in these areas comprise increased researcher representation on key committees, working groups and research related events, in addition to demonstrable improvements to satisfaction ratings in CEDARS Q41 – Q41.5 and Q42.1 – Q42.4.

The wellbeing of research staff is taken seriously. We will proactively promote and signpost staff to all support mechanisms in place across the University (e.g., Employee Assistance Programme, Mental Health First Aiders and Champions). Success in this area comprises an increase in those who report agreement for CEDARS Q41 and Q42.

Employment

Whilst Loughborough University has relatively low numbers of research staff on fixed term contracts, it recognises staff frustrations in this area. Researcher job security is therefore a key area of focus for Loughborough. The following element of the EDI core plan

- We will create an environment that embeds equity, diversity and inclusion as everybody's responsibility and is a fundamental consideration in all areas of activity

will drive action to ensure redeployment practices are effective and opportunities for transferring into other roles are appropriately signposted to research staff (EI3 and EM3). In addition, we will actively increase the numbers of researcher co-investigators on grant applications and train Principal Investigators to enhance opportunities for early career researchers. Success in this area comprises an increase in the numbers of ECRs as co-investigators in addition to improvements to satisfaction ratings for CEDARS Q14 – Q14.1.

Professional and Career Development

Underpinning our work in this obligation are the following two elements from the University's core strategic plan:

- We will align our research and innovation activities, raise the level of our research ambition, encourage collaborative and interdisciplinary working and invigorate our research culture.
- We will identify and invest in high-quality research that has the potential to make regional, national and global impact and we will work in partnership to secure sizeable projects that lead to innovation and meaningful change.

Consequently, we will provide a cohesive development and support framework to ensure researchers have the right development opportunities at the right time for their career stage (PCDI1; PCD16; PCDM3; PDCR1; PCDI2). We will build from expertise across the University, including the work of C-DICE to provide an integrated approach to the professional development of research staff. All stakeholders will be consulted on the development framework, ensuring institutional support prior to its delivery. Success in this area comprises approval of the framework following an appropriate consultative process with key stakeholders. Internal evaluations of session experience by staff will be positive, reflecting on the impact to their role.

We will ensure that there is a wrap-around approach so that managers also have access to appropriate training and development (PCDI6; PCDM1) to facilitate their roles appropriately thus resulting in an increase in the number of positive responses to CEDARS questions focused on Professional and Career Development. Attendance at developmental opportunities will be tracked through bi-annual reports, monitored through the Research and Innovation Committee.

To facilitate appropriate support, development and management of research staff, we will provide appropriate developmental opportunities for managers through the Organisational Development Hub. Success in this area comprises an increase in the numbers of managers participating in development opportunities and reflecting positively (through internal evaluations) on their usefulness in their role when supporting research staff.