HR Excellence in Research Award: 10-Year Review

1. Introduction

The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) is home to a research community of ~2,600, including Research Only staff, postgraduate research students (PGRs), and Professional Services. In total, 441 researchers were submitted to REF2021, 35% of our eligible population. It is our ambition to grow this number significantly by the next REF, through supporting current staff to undertake high quality, impactful research; and recruiting staff with track records in research. We recognise that this can only be achieved by maintaining a nurturing, supportive research environment and culture, and delivering the commitments set out in our HR Excellence in Research submission (HREiR).

UCLan have held the HREiR award since 2011. In 2021, we became signatories to the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*, further signalling our commitment to the research community. We report here on progress with our 2020-22 Action Plan, as well as outlining our goals for the next three years. We have made substantial progress over the last two years. However, in line with the sector, the Covid-19 pandemic presented a range of challenges to the University and some activities have slowed or been delayed as a result.

During the review period, UCLan has undergone continued significant and strategic change. In 2020, we restructured institutional support for research and knowledge exchange (KE) by bringing Professional Service support for research, impact and KE under the umbrella of a new Research and Enterprise Service (RES). In addition, the University published its Strategic Plan 2021-28. Priority 3, *Our People Experience*, works in tandem with Priority 4, *Real-world Research and Innovation*, to support our HREiR and Researcher Concordat commitments.

Our People Sub-strategy focuses on attracting and retaining the very best talent and enabling everyone to do their best work: tracking performance and nurturing research and leadership skills; investing in our recruitment and selection processes; fostering an inclusive staff culture, sense of belonging and increasing both staff and student diversity; and supporting healthy choices and wellbeing of all our people. The Research and Innovation Sub-strategy supports transition from our current research active status to becoming a research intensive, world-leading university, through commitment to developing and supporting homegrown and new talent, investing in building our research and KE communities.

2. Governance

Development of research staff, the focus of our HREiR plan, is managed in partnership between RES and the People Team, and is overseen by our Researcher Development Steering Group (RDSG), established in 2018. As well as Faculty Directors for Research from each of our six Faculties, the RDSG has representatives from across career stages, including Early Career Researchers (ECRs).

A Researcher Development Officer (based in RES) coordinates a programme of research and KE induction, training and development, and networking activities, overseen by the Head of Impact and Outputs Unit and delivered by teams across RES and elsewhere. This complements the range of support provided centrally by the People Team, and within Faculties/Schools and Research Institutes and Centres.

Training and development of our PGR community is led by the Graduate Research School (GRS). The GRS is now part of RES, better enabling sharing of training and development resources.

The work and progress of the RDSG is reported to the University Research, Knowledge Exchange and Ethics (URKEEC) committee, three times per year. This committee is Chaired by the PVC for Research and Enterprise.

3. Ten-year review

We have undergone a process of continuous review of our HREiR/Concordat actions, overseen by the RDSG (bi-monthly meetings) who have provided direction for the development and implementation of the Action Plan, and contributed to collation of our submission. We have gathered views from our researchers formally through the CEDARS 2021 survey (214 responses), allowing sector benchmarking, and more informally through regular canvassing of views on arising issues and development needs at monthly networking events (283 attendees over two year programme). During the review period, we have also started a programme of work to improve processes for capturing data needed to assess our effectiveness and track targets.

4. Key achievements – 2020-2022

Principles 1&2: Recruitment, Selection, Recognition and Value: In 2020, the University published and implemented its policy on the Responsible Use of Research Metrics (RRM) as well as becoming a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment. Guidance for promotion and recruitment has been updated to highlight the policy and advocate for the use of a "basket of measures" in assessing researchers.

A SWOT analysis on UCLan's strengths and weaknesses as an employer involving current colleagues and recent leavers, along with analysis of competitor Universities within the region, is informing the way in which the University presents its Employee Value Proposition and ongoing development of new recruitment, selection, retention and recognition processes.

Principles 3&4: Support and Career Development: In line with the sector as a whole, the University moved to home working in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with return to campus for most staff in September 2021, many taking advantage of the opportunity for hybrid working. Training and development provision by RES continued throughout this period, delivered online through Microsoft Teams. Online provision continues for the time being to accommodate new working patterns and ongoing access issues for some staff. Whilst online provision has been more inclusive, allowing easier access to training for staff across our campuses, levels of engagement have been falling recently and we are currently reviewing the types and modes of training and development that we deliver. Over 1000 researchers have attended training events or workshops since April 2020, on 40+ different topics, including funding, open research, REF and ethics.

In 2021, the University launched new induction and appraisal processes for all staff. Quarterly appraisals take place to set and review three-month objectives, with regular discussion of development needs. This system is currently undergoing a 12-month review with all appraisees and appraisers invited to contribute views. A new Induction Lifecycle and toolkit was launched in 2021 to support new staff and their managers, including a welcome booklet and event, and a dedicated page for researchers signposting the specific support available to them through RES and other Services.

All staff have access to LinkedIn Learning providing on-demand access to training courses and programmes covering a diverse range of skills. The University remains a subscriber to Vitae and our continuing partnership with Sense About Science has enabled 30 ECRs to attend Voice of Young Science training. In 2021/22, we invested in leadership training for nine researchers (three ECRs, one Senior Research Fellow and six Readers) through Advance HE and are exploring opportunities for specifically developing research leadership skills in minoritised groups.

Principle 5: Researcher Responsibility: We have successfully supplemented the already active College of Professors and Readers with two new forums for Early and Mid-career Researchers (commencing 2019). Facilitated meetings, with the agenda/programme set by members, are held online monthly and include training sessions from experienced researchers or Professional Services staff on a range of research skills, as well as providing opportunity to capture and respond to views and concerns.

The University has established a network of wellbeing and health champions (2022), with associated training and dedicated time in workloads. The champions come from across Faculties

and Professional Services, including researcher representation; and meet regularly to plan events and campaigns to support staff and student wellbeing.

Principle 6: Equality and Diversity: The University has been active in the area of EDI over the review period. As well as establishing a Director of EDI and enlarged EDI Team, the University launched its EDI strategy in 2022 *Belonging@UCLan*. Our ongoing work across EDI will focus on the following four pillars: (1) Diversify our people profile; (2) Eliminate or significantly narrow gaps within the learner body relating to recruitment, progression, awards and graduate outcomes in relation to protected characteristics; (3) Develop an enhanced inclusive culture and mindset within the staff and learner body, leading to a stronger sense of belonging for all; (4) Develop a national and international research profile in relation to EDI.

In 2021/22, we established a Research & KE EDI Group, replacing the REF2021 EDI Subgroup, with expanded membership and remit, including EDI aspects of REF processes, inclusivity of support for research and KE, Belonging@UCLan pillar 4, and responsible research assessment.

Principle 7: Implementation and Review: We established the Researcher Development Steering Group with specific responsibility for advising and supporting work to improve researcher development provision.

UCLan runs a bi-annual, all-staff engagement survey, as well as themed pulse surveys to understand the views of its colleagues, complementing the information collected from CEDARS 2021 (see Section 3). Staff are asked questions about appraisal discussions, experience of and opportunities for personal growth and development.

5. Future strategy and priorities for 2022-2025

In addition to continuing core researcher development activities, including the research and KE induction, researcher training and development programme, and career stage forums/networks, we will focus on five priority areas over the next three years:

1. Improving our data collection processes and analytical capacity for evaluating our training and development provision; collating training needs; and measuring satisfaction around research environment and culture. This will enable us to ensure that the support we provide our researchers is inclusive and fit for purpose.
2. We will align our researcher development and training provision for staff with that provided by the Graduate Research School for PGRs, ensuring that training and development is mapped to need, that gaps in provision across career stages are identified, and that resources are shared where appropriate. This includes reviewing current provision for staff, assessing sector best practice, and developing training pathways for researchers at different stages of their career, mapped to the Researcher Development Framework.
3. We will update our Researcher Portal functionality and content, providing a single source of information on training and development opportunities at UCLan and elsewhere; and ensure clear signposting to information relevant to researchers is in place on the UCLan intranet through creation of a Researcher Toolkit. We will also use and promote national resources, in for example, toolkits to support institutions and managers in their support of ECRs.
4. As part of the Research and Innovation Sub Strategy, we are consolidating our research groupings into a number of large research and KE University Institutes, to provide focus for excellence in research and KE. It will be a requirement that there are clear definitions, pathways and support in place to enable staff to work towards attaining Significant Responsibility for Research (for submission to the next REF) or KE, and full institute membership.
5. The University will build upon its REF2021 results and identify schemes and actions which will enable the development of the researcher, and the environment and culture within which they work. We will continue to invest in management and leadership training for our researchers; as well as providing internal and external opportunities for our ECRs to develop skills in research, impact, project management, public engagement and influencing policy.