



## HR Excellence in Research 12-year review (2020-2022)

### 1. Introduction and context

The University of Salford was one of the first UK universities to participate in the HR Excellence in Research Award, first receiving this in 2010. Our recent focus, through the University's People Plan 2020+ has been on three areas, where we have made notable changes and improvements: *1) Ensuring wellbeing is at the heart of everything we do; 2) Developing a more inclusive and diverse place to work and study; 3) Deliberately focusing on development, performance, reward and recognition for all.*

Recently, there have been significant changes for our research strategy and support. In July 2021 we launched the University of Salford Innovation Strategy 2021-26, which sets out our goals for research, knowledge exchange and enterprise success and leadership, and unifies our activities under the banner of innovation. Over the strategy period we will deliver on 5 priority areas, two of which explicitly relate to our commitment to the Concordat: *'Developing Creative Research and Enterprise Leaders'* and *'Transforming our Culture'*. To deliver our strategy we have created a new directorate of Research & Enterprise (R&E), supported by our Pro-Vice Chancellor Research and Enterprise. Our action plan for 2022-25 is aligned to this future vision allowing us to revisit and refresh several areas, continuously improving the researcher experience.

### 2. Governance of the HR Excellence in Research action plan

Our action plan is overseen by our Research and Enterprise Committee (REC), which is a sub-committee of University Senate and chaired by the PVC Research and Enterprise. This committee feeds into and approves an annual update on progress against the action plan each May. Our Researcher Development Working Group oversaw the progress of the action plan and reported to REC. From 2023, to support both this activity and wider researcher development objectives linked to our Innovation Strategy, this group will become a formal sub-committee of REC with membership representing researchers at different career stages and from all professional services directorates who support researchers. Our University People Plan is governed through the Strategic Enablers board, which reports to the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Team (VCET).

### 3. How this evaluation was undertaken and researcher views incorporated

For our 2018-2022 action plan development and review, researcher input has been gathered from an informal consultative group, the Researcher Development Working Group, with membership drawn from across the academic community. To inform our 2022-25 action plan, between February-July 2022 we initiated a project with external consultants to gather insight into researcher perspectives regarding our research culture at Salford. This involved focus groups and one-to-one interviews with 79 members of staff including: academic staff at different career stages including early career researchers (ECRs), postgraduate researchers (PGRs), technicians, professional services staff, senior academic leaders (Associate Deans and Deans of Schools) and senior management (PVC Research and Enterprise and Director of R&E). This activity culminated in an extensive and detailed report provided to university senior management (VCET) with a set of recommendations to take forward in line with our Innovation Strategy 2021-26. This forms the basis of many of our actions going forward.

Alongside this high-profile activity, we conducted a separate survey with the PGR community to determine satisfaction with their support from the Doctoral School, with their supervisory arrangements, and with the effectiveness of the training and development provision. Around 10% of the PGR community engaged (65 responses).

### 4. Key achievements 2020-2022 (*actions within previous action plan are in italics*)

#### Environment and Culture

- **Communicating about our concordat commitments (EC11):** *Our 'you said, we did' campaign in early 2021 resulted in feedback that researchers would like more online training, conference-style training concentrated into blocks of time, and more mentoring opportunities. This will inform redevelopment of the staff training provision during 22-23.*
- **New workload allocation management system (EC13):** Review and launch of a new workload model for academic staff, moving from a points-based system to hours. A number of focus groups and workshops were held during 2020 to gather perspectives of what was working and what could be improved with the system

and to communicate its uses and limitations. Over 2021/22 HR have engaged with all academics to introduce the new system, which went live in summer 2022.

- **Tackling discrimination, bullying and harassment (ECI3, ECM2, ECM3, ECR4)** – Launch of a new ‘Report and Support’ service for staff where any colleague or student can report an experience they have had or witnessed that is unacceptable and provides a safe and confidential way of highlighting where the university needs to take action. This was previously in place for students but was launched for staff in March 2021 and to date has enabled reporting of 97 incidents from staff. Guidance on the process and how reporting is managed is provided on our internal staff hub. Our whistleblowing policy was reviewed and updated in March 2022 and communicated through all-staff Internal Comms email. This now also allows for PGRs to act as whistle blowers.
- **Train managers in equality, diversity and wellbeing (ECI4)** – *Alongside the compulsory online modules staff undertake as part of induction we have introduced a new training approach for academic staff around effective PGR supervision. May-July 2022 we have been trialling in-person, one-day workshops to create a community and place for discussion around supervision issues, including wellbeing and diversity. Previously supervision training was completed through an online module. 60 staff have completed the new workshops to date.*
- **Research culture review (ECI6, ECM5, ECR5)**: We have undertaken an in-depth research culture review during 2022 (described in section 3), which informs our actions set out for 2022-2025.
- **Promoting inclusive and positive research cultures (ECF1)**: Where we act as a funder in distributing internal allocations, R&E has now embedded questions in our funding applications regarding support for EDI within a proposed project so this can be recorded, analysed and reported on annually.
- **Equality of opportunity between groups of researchers (ECF3)**: In 2020-21 R&E offered a ‘Reignite your Research’ internal call in early 2021 specifically targeted at early career researchers and those with equality-related circumstances who have found it difficult to maintain research activity during the pandemic. Six applicants were supported through this first call. Examples of support include travel abroad for archival research, travel to interview research subjects to contribute to the development of a monograph, and production of a film around interdisciplinary topics to support an application for external follow on funding. This will be taken forward as a new annual fund.
- **Prioritising equality, diversity and inclusion (ECM1)**: *A reflective action plan is now incorporated into the academic ethics training module to help researchers reflect on practice. In addition, during 2021 all areas of the university (academic and professional services) were supported through a series of workshops to develop an Inclusion and Diversity Action Plan, thereby providing clear goals and KPIs for achievement. A KPI around proportion of staff from a BAME background is now reported against quarterly at University Council.*
- **Flexible working (ECM4)** – *Reflecting on successful working practices during pandemic lockdowns the University has adopted agile working alongside formal flexible working on return to campus to assist with work-life balance for all staff and researchers. A Future Ways of Working Task Group developed new guidance and communicated to all staff in autumn 2021. Activities involved a colleague Q&A session in September 2021 and four ‘Ways of Working’ manager briefings in August and September, with new pages on the intranet explaining the principles of agile working and its relationship to flexible working alongside all related policy documents. Colleagues and managers are encouraged to explore agile working options with a focus on results rather than viewing work as a location we go to.*
- **Supporting researcher wellbeing (ECI3, ECM3, ECR3)**: EXPANDED FROM PREVIOUS ACTION.  
Due to the challenges our University community has faced operating during the pandemic, we have paid considerable attention to employee and student health and wellbeing. This has led to the development of a number of new resources alongside our existing Occupational Health and Employee Assistance Programme (counselling service from an external provider):
  - A new Mental Health First Aid Network, with over 65 members of staff trained across the university as Wellbeing Champions to provide an understanding ear for others and signpost to relevant support
  - In-house counselling service offering up to 6 sessions per staff member
  - US Sorted, a physical and mental wellbeing app that encourages physical activity. This uses tracking of daily activities against personal targets and allows colleagues to compete in private leagues.
  - Signposting to external services, e.g. My Possible Self from Priory Healthcare, which provides interactive tools, tips, exercises and activities to support good mental health.
  - We have recently subscribed to a new service to support PGR mental health called Frazzled Café, which provides an online community and regular meetings for researchers to attend and discuss any wellbeing issues. This is being trialled for 22-23.

- Staff are required to take annual leave allowance and this has been regularly communicated over the past 2 years due to the effect of the pandemic on workloads.

### Employment

- **Recruitment (E11):** *Our new recruitment system (Oleeo) was deployed in 2021 to improve the applicant journey. This restricts the panel from seeing information around protected characteristic’.*
- **Clear and transparent, merit-based promotion processes (E13):** Existing activities continue as BAU e.g. we have held promotions workshops for 2022 Reader and Professorial promotions process, and continued with our recognition mechanisms, e.g. PGR Supervisor awards and merit awards.
- **Funding streams supporting all career levels (EF4):** During preparations for the University’s REF 2021 submission we undertook analysis of the distribution of internal funding streams over the REF period (2013-2020), which determined that there was equal funding provided to ECR and senior researchers (36% respectively) and slightly less to mid-career researchers (29%). As described above we initiated a new funding call (Reignite your Research) for ECRs and returners to research and additional funding streams will be developed going forward in alignment to researcher career plans. We have also launched a new Innovation Strategy Funding Scheme targeted at all career stages to pump-prime new ideas.
- **Evidencing inclusive recruitment, promotion and reward (EM3):** *Annual monitoring of recruitment, and promotions processes is conducted through the university’s Athena SWAN committee and is managed by HR. All areas of the university, both schools and professional services have developed EDI action plans to focus on analysis of disparity and setting actions against a timeline to rectify this. These plans are monitored by the Inclusion, Diversity and Equality Committee (IDEC), a committee of Senate.*
- **Annual appraisal (EM4, ER3)** – achievements described below in Professional and Career Development.

### Professional and Career Development

- **Provision of training (PCDI1, PCDF1, PCDM3, PCDR1):** We have updated our Academic Career Framework pathways and revised the pathway structure to include an ‘Enterprise and Industry Collaboration’ pathway alongside the Research and T&L pathways. This framework will form the basis of the training offer for research, knowledge exchange and enterprise activities to be redeveloped over the 22-23 academic year.
- **Annual performance review (PCDI2, PCDM1, PCDR4 and links to EM4 and ER3):** Over 2021-22 the Salford Academic project has been delivered bringing in 3 new areas that have been under development since 2019 that provide improved ways of working for academic researchers:
  - Academic Career Framework – illustrating what good looks like for staff focussed on Teaching and Learning, Research, and Enterprise and Industry Collaboration to support annual review and career conversations.
  - Professional and Career Conversations – an updated approach to annual review that incorporates greater focus on career development aspects.
  - Workload model – a new workload system to improve the quality and consistency of workload allocation.
- **Leadership development (PCDI4, PCDM4, PCDM5, PCDR5):** In 21-22 we funded 15 researchers to attend external research leadership development training provided by Advance HE. Participants rated the content as useful but would have found it a better experience as part of a smaller group. Going forward we will revise how we arrange this training and look to provide it for smaller groups as part of our cohort-based staff development approach.
- **Monitoring and reporting (PCDI6)** – *this is already undertaken on a regular basis – HR reports on engagement with staff annual reviews (PDR) and the Doctoral School reports on PGR engagement with monthly supervisory meetings. Engagement with researcher development activities is reported annually in May to REC.*
- **Researcher assessment (PCDF2)** – *As a signatory to DORA, the university prioritises both responsible researcher assessment and responsible use of metrics during the development and implementation of assessment processes. This is most recently evidenced during the use of a developmental exercise (3-year research plans) to determine staff inclusion in REF 2021 and during the Professorial and Reader promotions process in summer 2022. Assessment panels use citation data mindful of its limitations and do not refer to widespread yet problematic metrics, for example, the H-index.*

### 5. Next steps, moving to triennial review (2022-2025)

Our People Plan 2020+ has enabled us to deliver a number of initiatives aligned to the Environment and Culture and Employment areas, therefore, with our new Innovation Strategy in place and a restructured central research support service we are focussing on the Environment and Culture and Professional and Career Development priorities. Our research culture review in 2022 identified some key aspects of the researcher experience at Salford where we can make improvements and we have incorporated these into our future action plan under 5 main areas (Table 1).

**Table 1. Future priorities for Salford for 2022-25.**

Priority 2022-25	Success Measures
<p><b>1. Wellbeing and EDI</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An updated PGR Wellbeing Concordat to reflect new priorities and future activities, incorporating student feedback.</li> <li>• Continue to provide a range of online and in-person wellbeing support for PGRs, piloting and evaluating new services, e.g. subscription to Frazzled Café.</li> <li>• Continue to provide inclusive funding schemes ensuring ECRs and those looking to restart research after experiencing equality-related interruptions can access dedicated funding annually.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Reward and Recognition</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed review of the Reader/Professorial promotions process and new criteria leading to a more supportive process with criteria reflecting the breadth of researcher achievements.</li> <li>• Provide annual, high-level recognition of staff contributions to research, knowledge exchange, enterprise and engagement at our Celebration of Innovation event, including staff from all groups, especially focussing on our ECRs and technicians.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Researcher Training and Career Development</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of new, structured programmes of activity for researchers at different career stages (ECR, mid-career, senior) supporting the development of leadership skills. To include a mixture of internal and externally provided support and run annually.</li> <li>• Launch of a new staff development programme in alignment to the goals of the Innovation Strategy including a greater focus on knowledge exchange and enterprise.</li> <li>• In addition to activities supported as part of the Technicians Commitment, fund a range of initiatives on an annual basis to support the career development of technicians who support research projects.</li> <li>• Completed review of the '3-year research plans' process as a development exercise now REF results have been published. Launch of a revised system that ensures ECRs are the focus and receive benefit from participation (as determined by participant feedback).</li> <li>• A new programme of training for academics interested in developing commercial products and services from research and producing business cases.</li> <li>• Deliver our new Research Information System (Worktribe) by the end of 2022, which will enable research-active staff to display a public-facing profile containing all activities (grants, outputs, impact and engagement activities) with the ability to download information as a cv.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Researcher welcome and induction</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver a new induction programme aligned to the new Research &amp; Enterprise directorate to ensure 100% of new researchers are aware of: our commitment to the concordat and how the University demonstrates this in practice; all policies and processes relating to research; our training, development and career support.</li> <li>• Redevelopment of the PGR induction and training offer as a cohort-based model to build networks and community. Aiming to achieve 80% of PGRs reporting positive feedback.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Researcher engagement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalised governance for the overarching area of researcher development to reinforce our commitment to oversight of matters relating to research support and research culture. Relaunch of our committee to include representatives from all research career stages and professional services staff from across the university to support this.</li> <li>• Regular participation in Vitae's CEDARS survey with results reviewed by new governance committee and incorporated into forward planning (to sit alongside existing informal gathering of researcher feedback through surveys and after attending training events).</li> </ul>