

Oxford Brookes University eight-year review: supporting statement

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

We are a post-1992 university with just over 17,000 undergraduate and postgraduate taught students, and around 760 academic staff. We have around 450 research students and around 100 research-only contract staff, based in four faculties: (1) Health and Life Sciences, (2) Technology, Design and Environment, (3) Business and (4) Humanities and Social Sciences, and 15 Departments. As a snapshot, we currently have 14 postgraduate research assistants, 33 post-doctoral research assistants, 12 research associates, 39 research fellows, 12 senior research fellows and 3 other contract researchers (total 113). To build capacity for research, we have a long established commitment to invest in a programme of 2 to 5-year early career Research Fellowships, and whenever possible, we appoint our own fixed-term postdoctoral contract researchers to these posts. They are funded by strategic central funding and faculty investment. Almost all departments have subsequently taken many of their Fellows into permanent academic positions. In REF 2014, we were among the top ten UK universities in terms of progress since the 2008 RAE based on research power (a 41% increase) and we are working to continue on this upward trajectory. In the 2019 Times Higher 'Young Universities' rankings, we were placed 1st in the UK for research and for some time have been the only UK university to be ranked in the QS 'top 50 under 50'. We are currently developing an ambitious and exciting 2021-35 Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy, which has our researchers, and support for them, at its heart.

HOW THE INTERNAL EVALUATION WAS UNDERTAKEN

Oversight of the review process

The Director of Researcher Development led the eight-year review process in consultation with the Pro-Vice Chancellor Research (PVCR), the four Faculty Associate Deans for Research, the Director of HR, the Research Support Director of the Research and Business Development Office (RBDO), and others. Having held the award since 2012, the HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) Award and consideration of Concordat principles are firmly established in our practice.

Embedded formal University mechanisms for ongoing consultation and review

Since 2012, the HREiR Award has been a standing item on the agenda of the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC). This embedded practice ensures that both our Action Plan and consideration of how we address the principles of the Concordat are regularly and formally reviewed in the context of our overarching research strategy. RKEC is an inclusive group, Chaired by the PVCR, which encourages and facilitates the input of researchers and their representatives at every level, and across the University. Its membership includes representatives of contract research staff and Research Fellows, Research Managers, and the four Faculty Associate Deans for Research (and others), and members are responsible for 'feeding down' information to researchers in their areas. There is close two-way communication between the University RKEC and the four Faculty RKECs, which also have researcher representation. Thus, the Action Plan has been regularly, formally reviewed since we first achieved the HREiR Award, and views of researchers have been taken into account through embedded formal processes, at every stage, including the current eight-year review process. This statement and Action Plan were formally approved by the University RKEC at our April 2020 meeting.

CROS 2019

We also gathered researcher views through CROS 2019. 51% of our researchers responded to the survey and results were reviewed by a small working group consisting of the PVCR, Director of Researcher Development, and Researcher Development Co-ordinator who produced a summary document and action plan which was discussed and agreed at University RKEC and distributed to Associate Deans for Research for discussion at Faculty RKECs, then to be implemented at Faculty level. Actions agreed by this mechanism are incorporated into our HREiR action plan.

Focus groups and feedback

We ran focus groups with researchers during the academic year 2018-19 to gather views on our support for researcher careers, our training and provision for researchers, and to highlight issues. We gathered feedback on our draft HREiR action plan through a direct email to all researchers.

Links with other awards and initiatives

In parallel to, and complementing, our eight-year review for the HREiR Award, work is ongoing across the University for Athena SWAN (AS), at both University and Faculty level. The University has held AS 'Bronze' since 2012, was one of the first universities to receive an award under the new expanded Charter in 2016, and are currently working towards renewal in autumn 2020. The Faculty of Health and Life

Sciences have held 'Silver' since 2014; Technology, Design and Environment have held 'Bronze' since 2016; Humanities and Social Sciences applied for 'Bronze' in November 2019 and Business are working towards submission for a 'Bronze' award in April 2020. These applications required in-depth analysis of data regarding research staff at all levels, their career development and key transition points, including focus groups considering specific aspects of provision for research staff (for example, maternity, paternity and adoption leave, and training and career development), and the respective steering groups are implementing detailed action plans. The Director of Researcher Development who leads for the HREiR Award also sits on the University AS steering group, and with the PVCr, who Chairs the group, ensure integration between the two initiatives.

The University participated in the Equality Challenge Unit Race Equality Charter Mark pilot in 2014 and has developed a Race Equality Strategy and action plan to work towards achievement of the Charter Mark by 2022. Again, work for this award is dovetailed with our HREiR Award in that it encompasses careful evaluation of data around recruitment, promotion, mentoring and experience of staff, including researchers, with some researcher-specific actions.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS & PROGRESS AGAINST STRATEGY SINCE 2018 (mapped against key Concordat principles, and our 2018 action plan)

At our last review, we identified the following as our strategic objectives

(a) Enhanced central support for researcher training and development (principle 1.1, 5.2, principle 3) Action 1

In recognition of expansion of our training and provision for researchers, the importance of researchers to the University, and their key contribution to our Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy, the PVCr agreed central funding to appoint a 0.6FTE Researcher Development Co-ordinator who took up post in March 2018. This appointment, which was originally envisioned as a 2-year temporary secondment, has since been made permanent and expanded to full time (since May 2019), testament to both our expansion and development of researcher provision, and also high level commitment from the University. She works directly with the Director of Researcher Development, and during the past two years, her support has been critical in driving our strategy, as detailed below. During 2019-20, the PVCr committed further funding to support a senior academic to lead on Research Integrity, Research Improvement and Data Management, and a FT Research Data Manager to support the post.

(b) Enhanced career development and training provision for researchers (principle 2.3, 3.3., 3.6, 3.7, 3.9, 4.11, 4.12, 5.3, principle 6) Actions 3a, 3d, 3e, 4a, 4b, 11, 13

Having launched our Researcher Development Matrix of researcher training, development opportunities and support (mapped to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework) in 2016, and embedded it in redeveloped, dedicated researcher support webpages, we have since been working to consolidate and build on this:

(1) During 2018-19, we held focus groups with researchers to gather feedback on their experience of usefulness and navigability of the new researcher webpages, and of the Matrix. We also conducted an email campaign and collated written feedback. Our original plan was to act immediately on the feedback as part of an ongoing project to make information about support more accessible to researchers. However, in 2019-20, this action was superseded by an extensive major redesign of the research webpages supported by our central communications and marketing team and with £50K investment from the PVCr. The new pages, due to go live in time for the new academic year 2020-21, will include, for the first time, profiles of research-only staff which are self-editable in order for researchers to be able to continually update and effectively promote their profiles externally. Research support webpages are also being redesigned and will clearly signpost resources and training and development opportunities.

(2) Through focus groups and other mechanisms (for example, one to one discussions with colleagues, discussion during training events, feedback from training events and Committee meetings) we gathered views on strengths and gaps in our researcher training. As a result of this, during 2019-20, we have offered a number of new workshops for research-active staff, including research-only staff – for example, on 'consultancy and IP', 'how to run a successful conference', 'global challenges research and international collaboration'. This is part of a current and ongoing project to enhance training and provision (see 'A new Research and Academic Leadership programme', below).

(3) In 2014, we determined that not all newly-appointed research-active staff (these include, but are not exclusively, research-only staff) were being identified in order that they could be invited to attend the 'Your First Three Years' development programme. The programme, which has been embedded for more than a

decade, includes three 'strands' of support and development provision: for (1) teaching, (2) research and knowledge exchange, and (3) research student supervision. Since 2014, we have been striving to implement and embed more effective practices to ensure that all researchers are correctly identified, invited and encouraged to attend. The recently appointed Researcher Development Co-ordinator has taken over responsibility for this, and we have seen huge improvements. As an example, in 2015-17, attendance levels were around 10-20 people at each session; this has now risen to 40-60 attendees at each session. Overall, 66% of those invited between Feb 2017-Feb 2019 engaged with the programme, and 73% of research-only staff engaged. We action to continually improve on this, with an aim that >80% newly appointed research-active staff overall will engage by 2023-24. This work has also meant that we now have an active database of current researchers, and have much more robust and effective mechanisms to identify and communicate with researchers regarding wider training and support provision.

(4) In January 2020 we ran the fourth in a biennial series of 'researcher careers pathways' events, with the theme of 'Identity' – identity beyond the PhD, beyond fixed-term contracts and career identity within and beyond academia. It featured an external consultant as facilitator and 'expert panels' of alumni who have followed a range of academic and non-academic career paths, and who discussed 'managing your life' and 'managing your career'. There were 96 registrants, including 28 research-only staff (25% of the researcher population). 100% of those providing feedback agreed that they 'would recommend it to others'.

(5) Having run, since 2016, a series of well-attended 'promotion roadshows' showcasing 'successful researcher stories', we saw a marked decline in attendance during 2018-19 and judged that we had satisfied an initial need presented by a pool of researchers / academic staff interested in promotion who were seeking information. We have now developed enhanced advice on HR webpages, and linked this with a project, begun in 2016, to develop a resource featuring inspiring stories of Brookes academics, described below in (d) 'Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion'.

(c) A mentoring scheme for researchers (principle 3.8, 4.14, 5.4, 5.5) Actions 5a-c

In our 2012 gap analysis, we identified that while a university mentoring scheme existed, it was little used by research staff. We developed a mentoring scheme specifically for research staff (including, but not specifically, research-only staff), launched in 2013, and currently supporting its seventh annual cohort of mentor-mentee pairs. The recently appointed Researcher Development Co-ordinator now runs the scheme and has revised publicity materials, application processes and record keeping. In its first years, we saw around 30-35 mentoring pairs annually. This has now risen to 48 mentoring pairs in 2018-19 (7 researcher mentees; approx. 7% of the researcher population) and 70 mentoring pairs (11 researcher mentees; approx. 11% of the researcher population) in the current academic year.

(d) Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (principle 1.2, 3.2, 3.3, 5.2, 5.4, 6.1-6.10, 7.5) Actions 1, 4b, 7

As described above, we are increasingly engaged in Athena SWAN, and are working towards achievement of the Race Equality Charter Mark. In addition, in 2018 we showcased publication of 'Making a difference: work/life experiences of Brookes' academics' at a 'live event' chaired by Dr Katy Gearing, Head of Industry Engagement at the Royal Society. Since then, we have developed a microsite featuring not only the publication but a complementary collection of inspiring video stories exploring diverse staff journeys into, and through, academia and their lives outside work. These resources showcase different career paths taken, the different backgrounds people have come from, the highs, lows and different ways in which people combine their professional and personal lives. A parallel project on women and spinouts, in collaboration with the University of Oxford and Vitae and funded by EPSRC, has resulted in a resource featuring blogs, videos and inspiring case studies exploring the entrepreneurial pathway from research to spinout leadership.

(e) Improved engagement in CROS (principle 7.2) Action 6, and CROS outcomes

Having improved researcher engagement in CROS from 16% in 2011 and 2013, to 30% in 2015, we again saw a disappointingly low (18%) response rate in 2017. We have put actions in place to address this, and were delighted with a 51% response rate to CROS 2019. Moreover, feedback from CROS was overwhelmingly positive (selected data appear in our action plan) and we exceeded the sector average in all but very few areas (all of which have been addressed in our action plan going forward). 91% of our researchers who responded to CROS 2019 agreed with the statement: 'overall, I am satisfied with my experience as a researcher at Oxford Brookes' (compared to 64% in 2017).

STRATEGY FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS, INCLUDING SUCCESS MEASURES (mapped against key Concordat principles, actions have a blue background in our 2020 action plan. S = success measures)

A new Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2021-35 (principle 2.2, 2.4, 3.1-3.9, 4.10, 4.11 4.13, 5.2) Action 10

Next year we begin to implement the first 5-year phase of our new Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2021-35. There has been an extensive and inclusive consultation process, involving input from researchers, which is ongoing. A key element of the strategy is to increase the capability and capacity for research, and continue to build an ambitious, supportive and inclusive environment in which researchers can excel. This includes a commitment to significant investment in research and knowledge exchange, and support for researchers, which is reflected in our HREiR action plan going forward. **S:** Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2020-35 launched.

A new Research and Academic Leadership programme (principle 2.1-2.3, 2.6, 3.1-3.4, 3.6-3.9, 4.10-4.14, 5.2-5.6) Actions 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 3e

In 2016, we conceptualised and launched an integrated Academic Development Framework, incorporating research management, research degree supervision, leadership and teaching. As part of this, as mentioned previously, we developed and launched a 'Researcher Development Matrix' of training, support and resources for researcher development, mapped against the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. We are now embarking on a major new project to further develop this concept, and are designing a career-wide and career-long CPD framework, EXPLORE@Brookes. As part of this, we are reviewing and enhancing our long-standing 'Your First Three Years' programme to include improved provision for all newly-appointed research-active staff. The EXPLORE@Brookes framework will go further in providing continuing CPD support for staff as their career develops, with research and knowledge exchange-focussed, leadership-focussed, and teaching-focussed 'strands', and engagement with the programme will be embedded through the annual appraisal process. There will be a distinct pathway for research-only staff. The framework will incorporate a range of new modules, many of which came out of suggestions from researchers during focus groups; including, for example, mandatory modules on research ethics and integrity, and optional modules on knowledge exchange and commercialisation of research, grant writing, research resilience, strategies for successful networking and an introduction to writing and publishing. There will be a strong focus on the skills, attributes and competencies that participants need to develop in order to progress. There will also, through the Framework, be enhanced training, development and support for PIs to manage and support the career development of their researchers, including a focus on annual appraisal. Alongside this major initiative, we are redesigning our researcher and research support webpages, as described previously. **S:** Advance HE accredited Framework and new webpages launched in time for the beginning of the 2020-21 academic year

Research Excellence Awards (principle 3.3, 3.7, 3.9) Action 3d

In 2016, we launched our 'Research Excellence Awards' scheme, which are open to Research Fellows and all academic/research staff. We make around 30 awards every year, totalling around £300K. In 2019-20 we broadened the remit of the scheme and piloted a programme to enable post-doctoral researchers to gain experience of designing a research project and supervising an undergraduate summer student, and thereby start the journey towards being an independent researcher. We made 7 awards (£25K total), funding a student bursary, research expenses and £750 for the researcher to spend on their own development. The recipients will be asked to provide written feedback on how the scheme benefitted them, and we plan a celebratory showcasing event. Subject to evidence of success of the pilot through positive feedback, we plan to incorporate the scheme into our annual programme of support for researchers going forward. **S:** Feedback indicates pilot scheme successful; 5-10 further annual awards

CEDARS (principle 7.2) Action 6

Having learnt that CROS and PIRLS are being replaced by a new, combined survey of contract research staff and PIs - the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) – we will engage with it from 2022. We have taken part in CROS for many years and, as detailed previously, have now developed strategies to ensure strong engagement from researchers. We have not previously taken part in PIRLS, so will work to engage our PIs with the new survey. **S:** achieve >40-50% engagement in CEDARS 2022

The new Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (2019) (principle 7) Action 14

We are excited about the launch of the new Concordat and have committed to become signatories in May 2020 in order that our new Concordat action plan and HREiR action plans are aligned (decision taken by RKEC, December 2019). The initiatives described above will form key elements of our new Concordat action plan going forwards. **S:** Concordat action plan agreed and made public by May 2021