

## Researcher Development Concordat Annual Report 2022-2023

The University of Bath received the HR Excellence in Research Award in September 2011 and has retained it since. 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 10-y Progress Report and Action Plan 2021–23 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**)

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. These principles highlight the University's commitment to recruiting, retaining, and developing diverse and talented RS across the university. The Researcher Development Concordat/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](#).

## Key Achievements and Progress Since 2021

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.

Key achievements to date have been grouped according to the 2019 Researcher Development Concordat principles. Our key achievements reflect the university's values, specifically **Supporting**, **Fostering** and **Aspiring**, which link to our progress in building a positive research culture at the University and enhancing the professional development of researchers.

### Environment and Culture

During 2021/22, part of the Enhancing Research Culture Fund was used to undertake several activities to establish a baseline for our research culture at the University. These included:

- A series of [World Café Workshops](#) with staff and students across the University to facilitate conversations about research culture at the University

- Analysis of the Research Culture related questions from current staff and student surveys (PRES, PDES, CEDARS and Staff Work and Wellbeing Survey)
- A RAG Rating of the University's position against the recommendations in the [Russell Group Research Culture and Environment Toolkit](#)
- A project to find out more about research enabling careers at the University and the support they need

Following this work, a Research Culture Action Plan 2022-2024 was created to work towards key themes that have been identified, as follows:

- **Workload** – the challenges posed by current workloads is a theme that emerged in every piece of baselining work. It is a challenging area to address and is one that is being raised via other fora. The Research Culture work should seek to support and augment these efforts through its work and the provision of supporting evidence.
- **Recognition and reward** – effective recognition of all contributions to research by individuals in all roles
- **Building inclusive communities** for researchers at all career stages – our sense of community emerged as a strength from the World Café Workshops so this is something we should seek to build on. Improving a sense of community emerged strongly from the survey analysis work so strengths and gap need to be identified so that we can learn from good practice and address the gaps.
- **Communication, communication, communication** – It is clear from several the baselining projects that there is a significant gap between perception by policy owners / central services and individual researchers in several areas. We need to highlight and communicate existing policies and support mechanisms.

The University held its first annual Research Culture Week in 2022, with events held every day, including an Images of Research competition held all week. Outcomes included:

- The Research Culture Week announcement received 864 views
- 234 attendees were recorded at events across the week
- Jobs that make a Difference campaign page had 673 page views

The Research Staff Working Group (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 five out of the top six departments with the highest numbers of RS are now represented.

University-wide activities were run across National Postdoc Appreciation week in September 2022, culminating in a Postdoc Pizza social event that was attended by up to 50 postdoctoral researchers. This has led to increased engagement with local research staff events and networks, such as a new Postdoc Away Day in the Department of Mathematical Sciences.

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**

- A 2-y pilot with three different research groups/departmental teams was launched in 2022 to assess the impact of moving FTC researchers onto permanent contracts.

## **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, 83 RS have attended this programme, inclusive of the 2022 cohort. Of those researchers who have completed the Academy, >40% have obtained a lectureship position or independent fellowship, with 11 being promoted at University of Bath.
- A pilot Fellowship Academy to increase the success of early career researchers (including RS) in gaining research fellowships has been launched. This competitive programme includes 16 researchers from across the university and will run until September 2023.
- We have continued to offer places on Leadership in Action, collaboration with universities across the United Kingdom, including a collaboration with Universities of Exeter and Cardiff in 2021, as a GW4 Leadership in Action programme. To date, 25 research staff have completed Leadership in Action.
- We have continued to support RS to obtain a qualification in project management and, following feedback, have now opened this opportunity to research enablers. Since 2020, 36 RS or research enablers have undertaken all or part of the 23-h training required in preparation for their qualification exam.

## **Priorities for 2022-2023**

The University has continued to make significant progress in supporting the career development of researchers. However, a key challenge is ensuring that all researchers know and understand the value of the training and professional development support offered. Additionally, as work has begun to return to >80% in-person for most research-active staff, it is important to consider the accessibility to training and support. Finally, precarity of employment continues to be a prominent issue for research staff. Therefore, the main areas of focus for 2023 will be:

- Celebrate good management practice and value of professional development using RS and managers' voices in case studies
- Review all current training and development opportunities to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose and delivered in the most accessible formats
- Establish working group to make recommendations to improve the career progression of researchers and reduce the use of fixed-term contracts (FTC) for these roles