

Bath Spa University – 8-year review of HR Excellence in Research Award

Background

Bath Spa University is a smaller, resourceful, new university which continues to grow and develop its strengths. Staff and students are engaged with and have developed innovative and enterprising collaborations across a wide range of sectors, applying interdisciplinary and creative and professional practice-based approaches led by our three strategic research centres in partnership with School level research centres and groups.

Our current academic and research community comprises:

- Academic staff (both teaching and research): We currently have 410 salaried staff on academic contracts (totaling 334.56 FTE)
- 48% of staff to date have been identified as 'Significantly Responsible for Research and will be submitted to REF2021
- There are 10.9 FTE staff on research only contracts, of which 4.6TE are on fixed term contracts associated with research grants
- Research Leadership community: 75 profs/readers (totaling 61.25 FTE)
- PhD community: 147 PGR students = 144 PhD and 3 MPhil

The University is structured around eight academic schools which are designed to be fast-moving, responsive and innovative, collaborative, and interdisciplinary.

Evaluation of Concordat at Bath Spa

The University's Action Plan for the implementation of the Concordat is an evolving document that is reviewed and updated on a regular basis, through regular meetings between the Research Support Office, Researcher Development Manager, HR and the Graduate School Manager. The HR Excellence in Research Working Group (chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research & Enterprise)) meets twice per year and reviews and evaluates progress against the Action Plan. Academic staff across each of the academic schools and a Research Fellow nominee are represented on the group.

The HR Excellence Working Group reports into the Research and Ethics Committee where a wider discussion of any issues takes place, alongside approval of Action Plan revisions. Actions arising from the Concordat Action Plan, and new developments are also discussed with our Research Leader community (through termly meetings) and with Heads of School at Research Strategy meetings, which take place twice per year. This is particularly important in addressing issues relating to workload management time and funding to support researcher development activities, and issues relating to research staff promotion and leadership roles and responsibilities.

Development of the research culture and environment have also been a key element of discussion at REF2021 Unit of Assessment Leader meetings, as well as discussions around independent researchers and the University's approach to identifying and supporting staff who are 'Significantly Responsible for Research'.

Key Achievements and Progress

A. Recruitment and Selection

A series of five half-day line manager development sessions have been scheduled to run throughout 2020 focussing on the topic 'Leading for Success' at Bath Spa University. These sessions have been designed to provide an overview of line management skills, tools and techniques, as well as the opportunity to reflect on the Bath Spa University approach to line management in the context of our Strategy 2030.

The RSO has also worked closely with HR to streamline recruitment processes for new research staff, arranging start up meetings at the award of each new grant to ensure that business cases are prepared in a timely manner, and that the needs of research staff recruited to research grants are identified at the start of each project and a plan in place to support them appropriately.

B: Recognition and Value

A mentor programme for Early Stage Researchers (ESRs) and our Research Fellows community has been set up and evaluations have shown that this has had a positive impact on both mentees and mentors taking part.

The Researcher Development Manager has worked closely with our Research Fellow community to ensure that their training and development needs are met, and to ensure that they feel integrated into the wider research culture at the University. Case Study A highlights progress and good practice to date.

A new suite of Research Assistant roles aimed at PhD students and part-time teaching-only staff who find it difficult to access opportunities to undertake research has been put in place to support our REF2021 development. As well as supporting the development of our REF2021 impact case studies and creative practice as research e-portfolios, one of the overarching aims of the scheme is to support new researchers with key skills to enable them to move into research careers - Case Study B gives more details of this scheme, and of the impact that it has had on individual career progression.

Termly Research Leaders meetings, an annual Professoriate and a new annual Research Festival aim to promote good practice, share successes and foster inter and trans disciplinary working, and gives our research community a valuable opportunity to discuss and shape the research environment and culture of the University.

This academic year a new 'Research Matters' initiative is being taken forward, which will bring the University's excellent research and the impact of our research to the forefront of our institutional strategy and core values. The initiative aims to celebrate research across the university, with a suite of materials developed to underpin our recruitment and marketing information, our learning and teaching development, and our international profile of research excellence. A series of podcasts are being produced to highlight the research included in our REF2021 impact case studies, and to inform open days and other events, and e-portfolios published on our research repository which document the research processes that underpin our creative practice based research. Research Fellows have been strongly encouraged to engage with this initiative.

C. Support and Career Development

As part of the MA in Professional Practice in HE programme, a new module in Researcher Development (targeted at PhD students) was launched in September 2018, and a module in Supervising Research (targeted at RF and ESR staff) began in June 2019. Both courses have had good uptake across the community and 20% of RF staff have enrolled to date. Feedback has been excellent and the Researcher Development Manager is collaborating with the MA Programme Leader and team to deliver the co-designed modules and to evaluate and review their impact.

The Journeys in Research series has continued to be a success and is welcomed by our ECR, RF and PhD communities. Since the inauguration of this series in 2017 the RDP has funded and supported 21 workshops designed and led by researchers for researchers. Materials on this series and its success were presented as a poster in the Vitae conference 2018. The addition of opportunities for accreditation through MA modules, formal mentoring through centrally organised schemes and funded opportunities for professional coaching has also added to the breadth of the training and development opportunities on offer.

The University is in the process of renegotiating the workload management system after a period of restructuring. Heads of School have now agreed to a range of workload tariff allocations for researcher leadership responsibilities, and have committed to incorporating these into the workload planner for 2020/21. The criteria for 'Significantly Responsible for Research' and independent researcher status for REF2021 has also been approved by Research England, and Head of School have committed to a research allocation for all SRR staff, plus an additional scholarship and development allocation, mapped against the requirements of the new Concordat. This is a positive step forward, and ensures that research staff have time protected to undertake their research and associated development.

Both the Researcher Development Manager and the Head of Research Support Office sit on the steering group for the Line Management forum and training, and work with HR to ensure that researcher leadership needs are embedded within the programme and that Principle Investigators have the relevant skills to recruit and manage their research staff effectively.

The University is hosting a workshop on PhD employability with the UK Council for Graduate Education: PGR Employability: Challenges and Effective Practices April 24th 2020, aimed at supervisors and researchers to address these issues.

D. Researcher's Responsibilities

There has been a focus on research integrity and ethics training and development over the last two years, with mandatory roll-out (for all staff and PGR students) of ethics training, and workshops and events offered through the Researcher Development Programme. As a result of this work, the Code of Good Practice for Research and Approach to Research Ethics and Integrity documents have been refreshed, and disseminated to all staff.

A new PVC (External) has been appointed and has been working closely with the PVC Research on the redevelopment of our Enterprise Strategy, including the development of placements and internships for PGR students and ESR staff. In parallel with this, our new town centre Enterprise Hub has been launched, which offers space for business and staff/student co-working opportunities, and 6 academic staff (including 2 ESRs) have been awarded industry fellowships to engage with the Research England funded South West Creative Technology Network, in which Bath Spa is a partner. An additional £7k NET Fellowship has been awarded to an ESR in Creative Computing. We will have a further series of fellowships that will run in parallel with the two programmes, which we will actively promote to our academic and research staff.

E. Diversity and Equality

The University has undertaken a range of activities to support equality and diversity in the last two years, and has launched a series of staff networks, events and workshops. The University Equality Objectives were revised in 2018 to bring to the forefront the recruitment, inclusion and retainment of women and BME staff and students, with four equality objectives agreed which are set out below.

Equality and Diversity Training is mandatory for all staff involved in the selection of outputs for REF2021, and in the SRR identification process, and a series of training workshops was delivered in 2018/19 and in the Autumn of 2019. A REF2021 Equality and Diversity Working Group has been set up to monitor our REF Equality Impact Assessment, and to evaluate the development of our submission process.

F. Implementation and Review

We continue to consult widely on reviews of the HR Excellence in Research Action Plan, and actively engage our researcher community with this process. In addition to this, issues relating to the Concordat are discussed with our researcher leaders, and as part of ongoing discussions with our Researcher Development Manager with the Research Fellow community.

Future strategy, next steps and success measures

The development of the Action Plan to meet the requirements of the new Concordat will be a priority for the remainder of 2019/20, and a summary of actions identified for the next 2 years is set out below:

A new 4 year action plan will be developed by July 2021 to address the Principles of the revised Concordat.

<i>Concordat Principle</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Recruitment and Selection	Training and development for Line Managers remains a priority, and there will be a series of workshops delivered over the next few years to strengthen our employment practices. This includes ensuring that Managers are equipped to make strong recruitment decisions to support the University's new staffing strategy relating to our core brand of creativity, culture and enterprise

	<p>There will be a continued emphasis on measures that aim to reduce the gender pay gap at Bath Spa, including Diversity and Unconscious Bias training and the Developing Leaders Programme.</p> <p>A priority will be the development of the HR system that will be able to track training attendance more effectively.</p> <p>A statement on recruitment policies in relation to the requirements of DORA and The Wellcome Trust open research requirements is also being developed to address the use of research metrics in recruitment practices.</p>
Recognition and Value	<p>There will be an increased emphasis as part of the University 2030 Vision and Strategy on embedding research across all areas of our work. In particular there will be a focus on the Research Matters programme, and we will work more closely with the Students Union on the students as researchers initiative, including their involvement in the annual Research Festival.</p> <p>Work will continue with HR on embedding research plans and researcher development needs within the revised Staff Development Review process, and in ensuring that research staff are provided with sufficient allocations of time within the new Workload Planning system to support their research and development activities.</p>
Support and Career Development	<p>We will continue to offer the Journeys in Research series to PhDs, ESRs and Research fellows, and to offer them opportunities to engage with research through the Research Assistants and Graduate Researcher schemes, and with other opportunities through the MA programme.</p> <p>Development of the Enterprise Strategy and the new promotion route for Creative Enterprise and Innovation will inform our recruitment strategy in many of our academic schools. We will aim to support these staff and staff wishing to move into these areas through internships and a fellowship programme aligned to activities at our Palace Yard Mews Enterprise Hub.</p>
Researchers Responsibilities	<p>We will continue to embed ethical and responsible research practices across our work and to review and evaluate our training and codes of good practice in this area.</p> <p>The expectation is that we will move to a 100% academic and research submission in REF2027 and will therefore use the first two years after REF2021 submission to develop our research environment and culture and invest in and offer opportunities for independent researchers across the whole of our research community.</p>
Diversity and Equality	<p>The following strategic equality objectives relating to the Concordat have been identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We will secure Athena Swan (AS) bronze level accreditation by 2021 ● We will develop female staff at all leadership levels in order to ensure that female representation at this level is within a 5% variation of the percentage of all female staff at BSU ● We will increase the recruitment of BME staff from 7% of all of those staff appointed to 15% of all of those staff appointed in a year by 2021