

### **1. Institutional context and process**

Bournemouth University (BU), established in 1992, is growing in research intensity, with 132 (111.2 FTE) staff submitted to RAE 2008, 171 (161.8 FTE) staff to REF 2014 and 551 (513.01 FTE) staff to REF 2021. Enabling the development of research staff has been a critical element of this growth. As such in January 2013, we were awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award and to further the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (henceforth the 'Concordat'). The Research Concordat Steering Group (RCSG) was established and reports into the University Research & Professional Practice Committee (URPPC), which, in turn, is accountable to the Senate. The RCSG is now co-chaired between the Deputy Dean for Research & Professional Practice (BU Business School) and the Senior RDS Manager (Research Development & Support, RDS – the central university research office). Meeting at least four times per year (more frequently when required), the group comprises representation from across all four Faculties (including research staff representatives and more senior academic colleagues), HR/Organisational Development (OD), the Careers Service and the Doctoral College.

Ensuring our action planning is informed by researchers for the benefit of researchers is integral to our approach to the embedding of the Concordat. Evidence of the impact of the action plan includes data from CROS (37 responses in 2019, 57% response rate), our internal survey targeted at research staff (35 responses in 2020), facilitated feedback sessions and the compilation of case studies. Research staff at BU are at the core of developing this submission with the BU Research Staff Association (RSA) representatives reviewing progress against the action trackers, illustrating the impact of change and informing future planning. In the new action plan to 2023, ambitious targets have been set, in line with the wider institutional strategic plans which will deliver significant research growth by 2025 (with one success measure linked to the number of research staff). Thus, our action plan focuses on staff who are employed on 'research-only' contracts (this comprises our Post-Doctoral Research Assistants and Research Assistants, and we are cognisant of the unique and challenging position they hold within the research ecosystem), with opportunities open to our wider academic community, especially our growing ECR community. Through the COVID-19 crisis, this aspiration has been challenged (given the pressures on research funding and the rapid changes required to maintain educational delivery); however, we held firm in our intention to continue to grow research as a central tenet of our strategic plan. Currently, BU has 660 academic staff on 'teaching & research' contracts and 68 staff on 'research-only' contracts. Although we have a relatively small number of research staff, it is a significant growth on our first submission (2012) when we employed c.20 research staff. We expect this number to continue to grow as we pursue ambitious research targets, and with this further acceleration of enabling HR excellence in line with the Concordat.

### **2. Key achievements and progress against the 2019 action plan**

Solid progress has been made towards supporting researcher career development. We have enabled a revitalised RSA who are supporting and advocating for our researcher community; provided extensive training opportunities; ensured we have accurate data on who our researchers are; ensured there are informal/formal channels for researchers to feedback and have a voice; and provided funding for researchers to maintain employment between contracts plus promotion opportunities. That said, some of the plans outlined in our six-year submission were interrupted owing to a restructure of our Organisational Development team, meaning a lack of continuity in staff supporting the actions, further compounded by the unexpected retirement of the research manager responsible for this area of work (a post which has not been backfilled). Furthermore, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the ability to deliver on this plan owing to the reprioritising of staff time to focus on business-critical activity and the need for financial prudence at a time of great uncertainty. Highlights from our action tracker can be summarised as follows (action references in brackets):

- On November 13<sup>th</sup> 2020, we signed the new Concordat with the endorsement of the University Leadership Team (chaired by the Vice-Chancellor). This has been widely publicised across the University and celebrated at online BU RSA meetings and Early Career Researchers Network (ECRN) meetings, with a combined attendance of 27 members of staff (100% of the RSA and 11% of the ECRN) (GEN1). Regular meetings (latterly online) were held via the RSA and the ECRN to create and sustain a dialogue around the Concordat themes.
- The Concordat is a standing agenda item at Faculty Research and Professional Practice Committee (FRPPC) meetings and is regularly discussed with all DDRPPs and RDS' executive team (GEN2; B.2.1d).
- Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic the number of research staff placed on furlough was minimised (four in total), with the University meeting the gap between government funding and salaries. Research staff have been prioritised for access to laboratories and field sites to enable them to continue working wherever possible (B.2.1d).

#### A. *Recruitment and selection*

- With the implementation of the new HR system, we are now able to easily identify research-only staff. This data is presented quarterly to RCSG to inform action planning and on request, (for example, to support Faculty strategic planning) (A.1.0c). Induction has improved, with the CROS19 survey revealing that 60% of respondents found the BU-wide induction useful, compared with 42% in CROS17. In 2019, 80% of respondents were offered a local induction to the role with 67% finding this useful. In 2017, only 58% of respondents received a local induction (C.3.6c; F.7.1b).
- Strategic internal investment has directly supported new researcher positions, including the establishment of a Post-Doctoral Research Assistant within the Institute for the Modelling of Socio-Environmental Transitions and two clinical research fellows within the Institute of Medical Imaging & Visualisation. We have invested in the Academic Targeted Research Scheme, which provides researchers with opportunities to progress to Senior Lectureships focused on research. One BU researcher and 5 external researchers have benefited from this since 2018 (B.2.6a).

#### B. *Recognition and value*

- The value of research staff continues to be recognised by BU, with dedicated support from RDS enabling over 30 RSA and ECRN meetings over the period, plus day-to-day support for queries from research staff and ECRs. Issues raised through these fora are cascaded to relevant areas of senior management to address (B.2.1d).
- Bridging funding is available to provide continuous employment for research staff for short periods between externally funded contracts. This funding has supported 15 extensions during this period (B.2.4.a).

#### C. *Support and career development*

- Training provided through the Research & Knowledge Exchange Development Framework (RKEDF) offers upwards of 100 training / development events per year aligned to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. The programme (open to all research and academic staff) encompasses orientation training for new researchers (e.g. research induction and creating a research profile), training for applying for bids (e.g. funder specific information briefings, bid writing support, research methods, ethics), training for academics leading or supporting on awarded projects (e.g. project management and team leadership), and training on impact and knowledge exchange (C.3.2a). In addition to the provision of training, the creation of a Public Engagement with Research Network has brought together researchers to develop their skills and engage in cross-disciplinary networking. Professional Service staff support researchers to undertake public engagement activities, including Café Scientifique (C.3.3.d).
- The scope and content of researcher training delivered through the RKEDF has been tailored using feedback from the attendees, from the RSA, from staff surveys (e.g. CROS), and from focus groups. Training delivery is provided by a mix of external providers, Professional Services' staff, BU academics and online resources (B.2.6c). There is a specific pathway for ECRs, including research staff, delivering information and training to orient and assist researchers at the beginning of their research careers.
- The ECRN supports all ECRs at BU, including research staff. The monthly meetings alternate between having requested topics and being general open surgeries. Information from the meetings is made available to the Network. The academic leads make themselves available for queries and 1-1s outside of these meetings. The meetings also provide a friendly platform for ECRs to showcase their research (C.3.9d).
- STEAMLabs are an intensive form of workshop bringing together a small group of academics from all levels and disciplines with industrial or commercial representatives to form and develop ideas for new research projects. Research staff and ECRs are invited to attend. STEAMLabs are currently organised around the themes of our Strategic Investment Areas (B.2.3b).
- All Faculties have rolled out a mentoring scheme, which includes all research staff having been offered a named mentor within their Faculty (C.3.8.a). Furthermore, to increase visibility and engagement with researchers, all Faculties now have two representatives at the RSA (eight in total), with a further two institutional representatives attending URPPC (C.4.13c).
- Internal panels set up to distribute funding to researchers are working smoothly and offer increasing opportunities for research staff. For example, the ACORN Fund, specifically targeted at ECRs, has to date supported over 60 researchers in getting to grips with applying for funding, of which 18 researchers were awarded seedcorn funding to provide experience in delivering projects (B.2.6a).

#### D. *Researchers' responsibilities*

- Researchers now benefit from a new IP Policy (ratified in April 2020) and dedicated support from a Research Commercialisation Manager who engages with c.5 researchers per week. This has, for example, enabled a researcher-led medical device to be CE marked and to go into NHS usage, marking a step change in support and potential alternative careers.

*E. Diversity and equality*

- Our Equality, Dignity and Diversity Policy is reviewed annually; the institution retained its Athena Swan Bronze award in 2018 and four Departments have achieved the bronze award (Media Production, Psychology, Life & Environmental Sciences, and Archaeology & Anthropology). This departmental award now applies to over 80% of our research staff (E.6.3a).

*F. Implementation and review*

- The RCSG is now reviewed annually and as a result there has been a refresh of approach in 2020/21. Further to the University's endorsement for the Concordat, a Deputy Dean for Research & Professional Practice (to be rotated on a periodic basis) will now Co-Chair the RCSG – alongside the Senior RDS Manager - in recognition of its importance across the University. The RCSG has continued to meet a minimum of four times per year, with an increase to shorter, more frequent meetings whilst working remotely to enable greater engagement (F.7.3).

### **3. Future action plan**

The development of our future action plan has been driven by our community of researchers. Insight has been garnered through the scrutiny of CROS and PIRLS in 2019, feedback to the RSCG from Faculty and University RDS representatives, and RSA-led sessions to develop appropriate actions for the institution to forward. These actions have been developed and endorsed by relevant areas of professional service staff.

Success of future action planning will be predicated on ensuring that our research staff are supported to develop their research careers through appropriate management, appraisal and career development opportunities (especially mentorship). This will be secured through institutional cultural change and through far greater accessibility of the myriad resources offered by the University. Furthermore, we recognise the need to reduce the number of researchers on fixed-term contracts by addressing the career framework specific to this group of staff.

*A. Environment and culture: excellent research requires a supportive and inclusive research culture*

- Research staff, with central University support, are leading on the development of a virtual hub that will encompass the full programme of opportunities available to research staff. This will include a suite of new promotional tools, including videos and podcasts, to increase engagement with opportunities for researchers. We plan for 100% of research staff to receive an update on the hub on a quarterly basis, and for 50% of research staff to regularly engage with the opportunities to be made available via the hub (EC11, EC12, EC14, EC15). This will be captured through monitoring attendance at the relevant events promoted.
- Regular engagement events (two per year) will be facilitated by RDS and steered by research staff representatives to promote the Concordat to researchers, managers of researchers and research leaders. This will include facilitated sessions on overcoming the barriers to researcher development. The target is for 80% of research staff, and 50% of academic staff, to have attended one of these events by the end of 2022 (EC11, EC12, EC14, EC15, EC16). Crucially, we are seeking to reduce the number of researchers who have never heard of the Concordat from 47% (CROS19) to 20% in 2021 (CEDARS).
- Staff networks, designed to increase inclusivity and provide greater support for colleagues, are being extended to include race equality and parents/carers groups. Research staff will be recruited to develop these groups and ensure research staff are appropriately represented. Continued engagement will be secured through the aforementioned hub, with a target of 75% of research staff to become members of staff support groups, where applicable (ECM1, ECM3, ECR1, ECR5). We intend to record an increase in the proportion of researchers believing that BU promotes better mental health from 68% (CROS19) to 75% as captured in CEDARS.
- We will ensure that 100% of managers of researchers have received appropriate training on equality, diversity and inclusion, with the RSA tasked to provide quarterly reporting on the impact of this on the researcher community (EC14, ECR2). We intend to ensure the managers of researchers lead through integrity, with 90% (up from 71% in PIRLS 2019) considering this to be very important for a researcher leader. We also wish to secure demonstrable evidence that the national frameworks designed to enable greater equality, diversity and inclusion are understood by our research community (specifically aiming for 50% of researchers to demonstrate in CEDARS that they have an understanding of; Athena Swan (up from 46%), the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (up from 11%) and the Race Equality Charter (up from 11%).

*B. Employment: researchers are recruited, employed and managed under conditions that recognise and value their contributions*

- An updated career development framework for research staff will be developed which will resolve discrepancies between contracts and provide a pathway for career development (EI3). Bridging funding will be highlighted to researchers and managers at regular intervals (12/9/6/3 months) prior to the planned expiry date of fixed-term

contracts (EI6). Ultimately, we aspire to reduce the number and proportion of researchers on fixed term contracts from 86% to 50% (EI5).

- Extensive training is to be provided for line managers of researchers to ensure that good practice, tailored to the needs of researchers, is embedded within working practices. HR/OD will provide more support for line managers to undertake appraisals through the provision of appraisal resources on our VLE and appropriate training. This will be linked to actions to ensure that researchers receive regular, constructive conversations with regards to performance and career development (EI1, EI4, EI5, EM1, EM2, EM3, EM4, ER3 and ER4).
- Success will be understood through realising a positive trajectory in the CROS/CEDARS data i.e. that over 75% of researchers will have received an appraisal (up from 32% in 2019) by 2022 and over 80% to have found it useful (up from 67% in 2019). We are also enabling greater mentorship and aim for 50% of researchers to report they have worked with a mentor in CEDARS (up from 8% in 2019) and for 75% of researchers to depart having a career development plan in place (up from 57% in 2019).
- Researchers will be included in the development of policies and provided with opportunities to inform future planning (EI7) and all concerned will provide support to ensure that work is undertaken within the relevant policies, legislation and grant awards (EM5, ER1, ER2).

C. *Professional and career development: Professional and career development are integral to enable researchers to develop their full potential*

- The RKEDF will continue to provide the full breadth of training for researchers, including research staff, across each academic year. Plans are still in development for the next cycle but are likely to include all the popular training events from previous year, with more on some topics like research methods, and new workshops like the Dorset Crucible, which is being designed as an intense dive into the behaviours required for supporting interdisciplinary research. The scope and contents of the programme will be informed by feedback from a wide range of staff, the RSA, and the DDRPPs (PCDI1, PCDI2, PCDI3). We will evidence this through seeing an increase in the number of days of training undertaken, from 3.6 (as reported in CROS 2019) to at least 7, if not more.
- Internal funding opportunities for researchers to develop their careers will continue, including through the ACORN Fund for ECRs. The Chairs of Funding Panels will continue to prioritise internal investment for ECRs, including research staff (PCDI1, PCDI2, PCDI3).
- Research leaders and managers will embed the practice of consistent career development (PCDI1, PCDI2) and enable researchers to access guidance on alternative career pathways (PCDI3, PCDI5) with URPPC representatives leading culture change across the organisation. This will form part of the wider expectation that researchers will be able to access (PCDM3) and prioritise (PCDR1) career development, with 75% of researchers to state they are engaging positively in performance reviews (PCDR4) and an increase in the number of researchers reporting they have taken ownership of their career development (to 90% from 86% in CROS19).

#### 4. Broad success indicators

Our progress against commitments made in signing the Concordat will be understood by:

- Structural changes as to the career path for researchers, including the continued reduction of the use of fixed term contracts. By 2025, we aim to have implemented a new career framework and have no more than 50% of researchers on a fixed-term contract.
- Researchers across BU accessing regularly the resources and information available to them, having been signposted to this from myriad stakeholders, including line managers, Faculty leadership teams and central Professional Services. This will lead to demonstrable progression of researchers in academic and non-academic careers (evidenced through case studies).
- All researchers (except where there are exceptional mitigating circumstances) to receive annual appraisals (75% up from 32%), regular performance reviews, career development guidance, a minimum of 10 days of training per year (target of 7 initially, up from 3.6 in 2019) and opportunities to grow their academic leadership skills. 50% of researchers to be receiving appropriate mentorship (up from 8% in 2019).
- **Ultimately, we aim for BU to transition from a nascent research community to one which is recognised nationally as a leading institution in which to develop a research career.**

## Acronyms in this document

ACF – Academic Career Framework  
ACORN Fund - Acceleration of Research and Networking  
ADD - Academic Development and Diversity  
ATRS - Academic Targeted Research Scheme  
CE Mark - Conformité Européene  
CEDARS - Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey  
CoP - Code of Practice  
CROS - Careers in Research Online Survey  
DDRPP - Deputy Dean for Research & Professional Practice  
DHoDs - Deputy Heads of Department  
ECR - Early Career Researcher  
ECRN - Early Career Researchers Network  
EDI - Equality, Diversity, Inclusion  
ESRC – Economic and Social Research Council  
FRPPC - Faculty Research and Professional Practice Committee  
FST - Faculty of Science and Technology  
FTC - Fixed Term Contract  
FTE - Full-Time Equivalent  
HE-BCI - Higher education and Community Interaction  
HoDs - Heads of Department  
HR - Human Resources  
HREiR - HR Excellence in Research Award  
HROD - HR and Organisational Development  
IMIV - Institute of Medical Imaging & Visualisation  
IMSET - Institute for the Modelling of Socio-Environmental Transitions  
IP - Intellectual Property  
KPI - Key Performance Indicators  
MI (suite) – Management Information  
OD - Organisational Development  
PDRA - Post Doctoral Research Assistant  
PE - Public Engagement  
PER - Public Engagement in Research  
PGR - Post Graduate Researcher  
PIRLS - Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey  
PPDP - Personal Professional Development Plan  
RA - Research Assistant  
RCM - Research Commercialisation Manager  
RCSG - Research Concordat Steering Group  
RDF - Researcher Development Framework  
RDS - Research Development & Support  
REC - Race Equality Charter  
ResearchPAD - Platform where PGRs document supervision  
RI - Research Institute  
RKEDF - Research & Knowledge Exchange Framework  
RPMC - Research Performance Management Committee  
RSA - Research Staff Association  
SIA - Strategic Investment Area  
STEAMLab - Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Maths Laboratory  
SUMAC - Mentoring platform/company  
ToRs - Terms of Reference  
TU - Trade Union  
ULT - University Leadership Team  
UREC - University Research Ethics Committee  
URPPC - University Research & Professional Practice Committee  
VLE - Virtual Learning Environment  
WFP – Work Force Planning