

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 continues to be a critical element of this growth. In recognition, BU was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in January 2013. To further embed the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (henceforth the 'Concordat') the Research Concordat Steering Group (RCSG) was established. This group reports to the University Research & Professional Practice Committee (URPPC), which, in turn, is accountable to the Senate. The RCSG is co-chaired between the University's Professorial Lead for the Concordat¹ (Professor Michael Silk) and the Senior Research Development & Support (RDS) Manager² (Dr Rebecca Edwards). 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.

The outcome of BU's 8-year submission was confirmed by Vitae in March 2022. In the subsequent 14 months, BU continues to rebuild its research portfolio after the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted research growth. This translated into a reduction in external grants, shifting internal investment and priorities, and a reduction in the number of research staff from 68 to 52 (this included the loss of several of our BU Research Staff Association (RSA) representatives). At the time of writing, the University's senior management team is being restructured; this is currently manifest in a vacancy for a Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE). For an interim period, Professor Silk is one of several of the Professoriate working in an acting capacity with a particular focus on institutional research culture and environment. We are therefore anticipating the continued evolution of our actions over the next three years through our future action tracker.

2. Key achievements and progress against our 2021 action plan

Ensuring our action planning is informed by researchers for the benefit of researchers is integral to our approach to embedding the Concordat. Cognisant of the change within the organisation since the action plan was submitted, we recognised the need for additional insight as to the previous efficacy of actions intended to progress the career development of researchers. We invested significantly in understanding our progress towards the action plan by employing a postdoctoral researcher to enable engagement with the CEDARS survey and to undertake a programme of qualitative research with researchers and their managers (October 2022-July 2023). This yielded 157 CEDARS responses (20% overall response rate, including 21 research staff, 41% of the total and included interviews with 6 research staff, 12 managers of research and 3 senior research leaders. Importantly, the insight arising from this research has captured the voice of the researcher (and their managers) and enabled the RCSG (which includes up to eight RSA representatives and two institutional research staff representatives) to reflect on the progress made since the publication of our previous action tracker. Highlights of our key achievements are summarised below:

Environment and culture

- i) Promotion of the Concordat to research staff and their managers:** We have promoted the Concordat through myriad mechanisms (as detailed within our past action tracker), including an event held by Vitae onsite at BU and online, targeted

¹ Professor Silk completed his 5-year tenure as Deputy Dean of the Business School in 2022. He maintained the role as Professorial Lead for the Concordat & Co-Chair of the RCSG, given the wealth of experience Prof Silk brings to the role. In his 8 years at BU, he has successfully won and delivered five large ESRC/AHRC funded projects, managed 2 research assistants and 6 post-doctoral research staff who have gone onto secure permanent academic roles.

² Dr Edwards has held a series of post-doctoral research in leading UK universities, supported by funders including the ESRC and JRF, before successfully transitioning to a research management career. She now has responsibility for post-award services and knowledge exchange management at BU.

towards researchers and their managers and open to all BU staff. This included an overview of the Concordat and specific training for researchers and their managers. We promoted the Concordat via our external website and internally, and via the URPPC. Furthermore, our RSA promoted the Concordat to new starters via our monthly staff induction sessions. This has contributed to greater awareness of the Concordat, with a reduction in the number reporting through CEDARS that they have not heard of it from 47% in 2019 to 32% (ECI1).

- II) **Centralised co-ordination and promotion of resources:** We utilised our virtual learning space - Brightspace - to create an online community for our RSA to promote useful resources and events. This tool enables a central mailing list which, coupled with improved data sharing, has ensured that opportunities for research staff are targeted appropriately (ECI1). Using Brightspace, over 50 targeted announcements to research staff have been made, including training and development opportunities, invitations to share University culture/direction, and information about pay and promotion processes. The Brightspace resource also enables research staff to connect with each other through its communication tools, building mutual peer support networks.
- III) **Enabling our Research Staff Association:** Our RSA has been enabled to contact staff directly within their Faculties to discuss pertinent issues to feedback to the RCSG, and to run activities to build our research community. This included social events and writing retreats (ECR1;EI7). Our Research Development Co-ordinator supports the RSA with administrative support and funding for the activities.
- IV) **Growing our early career research (ECR) network, inclusive of research staff:** We supported our ECR network to grow in strength and maturity over the past two years, providing a critical conduit for research staff to access opportunities. The network supports ECRs, research staff and PGRs (Postgraduate Researchers) at BU, offering general advice and support as well as tailored workshops for skills training and career development. It also provides an opportunity to network and form connections. The full programme for the past two years includes tailored support and conversation on academic publishing, work/life balance and research impact. Furthermore, BU is now an established partner of the British Academy's ECR Network South West Hub, which was launched in May 2022 and promoted through the Brightspace hub. Established initially as a pilot, the hub is one of three in the UK alongside Scotland and the Midlands, set up to support ECRs in the humanities and social sciences. As a result of the successful pilot, the Network will continue for the next three years and roll out nationally. The networks provide the opportunity for researchers to meet with their peers and talk about issues affecting them, supporting good mental health and wellbeing (ECI3). In addition, researchers are provided with the opportunity to develop their research identity amongst their peers (PCDI4, PCDM2, PCDR6) and they are an effective communication channel, which has helped encourage engagement in policy development and awareness (ECI5, ECM5, ECR5, EM5, ER4).

Employment

- I) **Development of a career framework for research staff and reduction of the use of fixed term contracts:** In our previous action plan, we detailed the importance of creating a career pathway for our research staff (EI3; EM3). Since publication, the University has agreed to review our Academic Career Framework in its entirety, bringing research staff into this review. However, progress towards this has been delayed as we look to negotiate and agree an appropriate way forward with the relevant trade unions, alongside wider challenges facing the sector on pay and working conditions. To compensate for the lack of a defined career pathway and associated processes, research staff have the opportunity to undertake range of extensive development opportunities which are suitable for all career stages, to develop their skills, knowledge and capabilities in relation to RKE. For those who wish to pursue a career in academia, a research position at BU is an excellent steppingstone, to securing an academic role within our Academic Career Framework (Pathway).
- II) **Strategic investment in research staff:** Recognising the value of research staff as central to the University's ambitions to grow our research capabilities, we utilised QR funding to create new research posts (12 in total) aligned to strategic growth clusters and connected to the Research Capacity Transformation Scheme. In addition to creating employment opportunities, these posts are nestled within high performing

academic teams. Successful applications for investment included a requirement to demonstrate how managers of project leads will further the principles of the Concordat and support the career progression of researchers employed (EI6).

- III) **Bridging funding:** BU has continued to provide Bridging Funding to enable research staff on fixed term contracts to remain in post whilst the outcome of future funding applications is awaited or to bridge to new awards. Over the past two academic years, this has been utilised 20 times, with three research staff supported more than once through the scheme (see EI5 and EI6).

Professional and career development

- I) **Research & Knowledge Exchange Development Framework:** The Research and Knowledge Exchange Development Framework (RKEDF) was launched in September 2016, bringing together a variety of initiatives to provide research support that is appropriate for academic staff (including research staff) at different levels and different career stages to help develop their research performance and impact. The RKEDF is reviewed annually to ensure it remains adaptable to meet researchers' needs as our research culture grows. The years 2019-22 were challenging for all, with the COVID-19 pandemic, budgetary constraints, and staff turnaround all having an adverse impact on progress. Despite challenges, we continued to offer a range of development opportunities accessible to research staff each year; this includes access to intensive bidding support in the form of workshops and external application reviewers (EARs), the Writing Academy (an intensive programme focused on helping staff form publication strategies and write, free from distractions); an impact programme providing development on public engagement with research and engaging with policy makers as well as other support resources (PCDI1).
- II) **Access to pump priming to pilot research activities:** Through our Accelerating Research & Networks Scheme (ACORNS), research staff have been able to access funding, thus gaining experience of managing and leading their own pilot research project. All awardees commit to submitting at least one high-quality application to an external prestigious funder, within a year of the ACORN project finishing (PCDI4).
- III) **Toolkits and training for line managers:** In 2022, we developed toolkits and guidance for managers of research staff. We also have in place a range of corporate management essentials workshops for all managers and leaders of staff (including new managers as well as those aspiring to be managers and leaders). This is in addition to the development, mentoring and coaching offered both centrally and locally within faculties and departments. This included making available toolkits and a range of resources (EI5).
- IV) **Research Leadership Programme (RLP):** The RLP (PCDI4) provides academics with skills and knowledge to plan and deliver research projects, and to get the best out of research teams. It follows on from a successful pilot conducted in 2019/20. With Research England's 'Enhancing Research Culture' funds, the RLP was re-activated in 2022 and delivered in hybrid format with online modules and face-to-face learning sets. The RLP is organised into three cohorts to support different needs - from research staff at the beginning of their research journeys to those who are experienced research leaders and line managers of researchers. The programme was designed to: a) help participants develop the necessary knowledge and skills to lead teams to deliver research projects successfully, b) to provide an understanding of effective team leadership and team working within a research context and maximise team performance in a challenging environment, and c) equip researchers with an understanding of their strengths and limitations to enhance confidence in developing their leadership skills in line with their career stage and future aspirations. In 2022, a wider leadership development programme was co-designed with Advance HE for all academic Heads and Deputy Heads of Department (who manage the line managers of researchers and some research staff). The first iteration is being delivered, with desired training outcomes centered on accountable leadership, and the development of appropriate skills and confidence to deliver responsibilities at organisational, functional and specialist levels. The programme aims to develop resilient, agile, inclusive and future-ready team leaders who exhibit personal growth and development whilst supporting high performance at an individual, team, department and organisational level.

3. Future action plan

Given we are transitioning from a two to three-year action plan, coupled with some slower areas of progress than we had originally intended (owing to the impact of the pandemic), our future action plan presents an *evolution* as opposed to a revolution. We intend to build on good progress already made, whilst more intensively developing the actions that we have identified as having less traction. Consequently, we have reviewed and updated our action plan in line with the insight from our research activity in partnership with the RCSG. The programme of qualitative research with managers of researchers/research staff – in addition to the early analysis of the CEDARS survey – has provided us with insights and strategies to tackle some of the more challenging areas. The focus of our future action plan is (I) engaging more effectively with the managers of our researchers, (II) progression of the career framework for our research staff and (III) accelerating engagement by our research staff with BU's extensive professional and career development offer.

Environment and culture

Targeting our line managers of researchers: In reviewing our action tracker from the previous two years, areas which have been slow to progress have been centred around the line managers of researchers. This is coupled with the insight from our research that demonstrates the experience of research staff is highly variable, depending on individual management. Furthermore, actions which have been more inconsistently progressed are those led by managers of researchers. Therefore, we will prioritise actions orientated towards the managers of researchers. This includes: the promotion of balanced workloads and appropriate flexibility (ECM3; ECM4), ensuring research staff attend inductions and maximise mentorship opportunities (EI2), ensuring research staff receive regular reviews/appraisals (EM4; PCDM1), encouraging research staff to undertake 10 days per year of professional development and progress mentorship opportunities (PCDR1). Other priority actions will include ensuring that funding for researcher training is included in bids (PCDI1), ensuring line managers undertake regular leadership and management training (PCDM5) and ensuring that research staff receive regular support to develop their careers both within and external to academia (PCDM2).

This will be achieved by delivering a tailored series of events for the small cohort of staff at BU (c32 members of staff have line management responsibilities for research staff). In addition to the general training provided to academic line managers, it will profile the Concordat and highlight the priority actions that managers of researchers should follow. Furthermore, senior members of the Professoriate, with a track record in supporting the career development of researchers, will be recruited to act as mentors for new line managers of research staff. This will enable them to explore the specificities of managing research staff and provide both a support environment, and collegial environment to grow as a manager of research staff, maximising the career development of individuals and teams (PCDM1).

We will develop a checklist for managers of researchers that is based on sector wide best practice and developed by the Institutional Research Culture and Engagement Group (which reports directly to the University Executive Team). This will include prompts to initiate induction/appraisal/career development conversations (PCD12), with a focus on developing on career plans and individual researcher progress to their line managers (EC15). Our research also indicated the importance of researchers feeling a part of wider research community. We want to ensure, therefore, that researchers are drawn into thriving research communities or teams, spaces where research is talked about formally and informally, where they find inspiration, connections, and feel valued. We will encourage managers to ensure that researchers are helped to network with possible collaborators and embedded in a research centre (PCDM4) and ensure that all research staff are connected to relevant Centres/Institutes (ECR1).

Employment - A pathway to research staff career progression and permanency: The institutional commitment to the implementation of a career pathway for research staff remains high, with the intent to commence this work in autumn 2023 (well in advance of the 2025 commitment outlined in our previous action tracker) (EI3). Commencement of this work is inextricably linked to the successful renegotiation of our Local Framework Agreement including the Academic Career Framework (pathway) and all associated employment processes such as recruitment, probation, pay progression, promotion, etc. Renegotiation with the trade union on the Local Framework Agreement commenced in autumn 2022 and good progress has been made to date. The outcome of the renegotiation will provide an

approach and model which can be applied to the development of a career pathway for our research staff. The scope of this research career pathway activity has been defined and includes consideration of the terms and conditions of employment. Should the University wish to review the terms of conditions for research staff, we will be required to consult and negotiate with both recognised trade unions. BU recognises the importance of employing research staff under conditions that recognise and value their contributions, and that stability of employment is critical. We continue to deploy effective redeployment processes and provide funding to maintain employment between research grants. BU has introduced a review of fixed term contract usage in order to identify opportunities to transfer individuals to indefinite employment contracts, particularly in areas of growth and strategic investment.

Professional and career development - Ensuring our research staff engage with BU opportunities: BU offers an extensive range of training and development opportunities through centralised training programmes. Our research indicates that our research staff are unable to fully utilise access to the opportunities offered by the institution; with a lack of time or concerns from line managers being cited as barriers. Coupled with the work performed to engage line managers of researchers more effectively, we are prioritising research staff engagement with opportunities through the communication mechanisms articulated in our action plan (EC11). This will highlight and promote the importance of undertaking at least 10 days of training per year and engage constructively with mentors (PCDM3), maintaining an up-to-date career development plan (PCDR3) and enabling an increase in research staff getting advice from the careers service (PCDR2). We also anticipate (funding contingent) that as a result of BU joining the ESRC South West Doctoral Training Partnership, that we will be able to a) externally fund additional post-doctoral research staff and b) significantly enhance the training and opportunities for these staff via the eight partner institutions.

4. Broad success indicators

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

- I) The development of a cohort of managers of researchers who are committed to progressing the career development of researchers, evidenced by a significant (50% or more) proportion of this group engaging with this agenda and the production of case studies of research staff progressing their careers at BU (measured through qualitative research and an increase in awareness of Concordat up from 68% to 80% in CEDARS).
- II) 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 aspire to have no more than 50% of researchers on a fixed term contract, down from 96% currently.
- III) Research staff to report benefitting from 10 days of professional development undertaken each year, regular performance reviews and accessing internal career development opportunities. To see an increase of 75% undertaking 5-9 days (up from 20%) and 25% undertaking 10 or more in CEDARS 2025.

Ultimately, we continue to 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.