**HR Excellence in Research Award: Ten Year Review Summary report**

1. **Institutional context**

Manchester Metropolitan is one of the largest universities in the UK with a community of over 40,000 students and 4,000 staff. Our purpose is to transform lives through the power of education and research. Research Excellence with Impact is one of two core goals at the University and our new Research Strategy (October 2023) builds on the foundations of an outstanding performance in REF 2021 which underlined our progress in improving both the quality and volume of research.

The new Research Strategy, developed through engagement with staff, is focused on five key priorities, all underpinned by an investment in our people and linked to our commitment to the Researcher Development Concordat (RDC) and HR Excellence in Research (HREiR):

* To invest in excellence and critical mass, across our people and infrastructure, to drive an innovative and inclusive research culture.
* To grow research and knowledge exchange funding to create a strong and rich research ecosystem, which is financially robust.
* To create a thriving doctoral research community to enhance and to grow our research environment and to develop the research leaders of the future.
* To enhance our global reputation to attract the very best staff and students to deliver our society changing research with the greatest global reach.
* To support, develop and empower our staff to enable them to deliver transformational research.

Particular areas of alignment include a focus on defining and communicating our research culture and our ambitions to provide: mentoring opportunities for all research staff; enhanced training and support for doctoral supervisors; parity of esteem for research ambitions in career and promotion pathways; and further support for the professional and career development of our research staff through enhanced inductions, further signposting to provision at local, faculty and institutional levels, and the development of provision where needed.

The University has two pathways for academic progression: the ‘Research, Education and Citizenship’ (REC) pathway and the ‘Education, Pedagogy and Citizenship’ (EPC) pathway. Following a review as part of the development of the strategy, research is now led through academic departments to (i) ensure resource management included both education and research (ii) to bring education and research closer together and (iii) to ensure research was more inclusive. Our target audience for the RDC and HREiR are 998 staff on the REC pathway with significant responsibility for research (SRR) and a further 138 Research Associates and Fellows, of which 80 are fixed-term research-only staff. Approximately 15% of the staff included in this work are early career researchers (ECRs) within eight years of the award of their PhD or six years post their first academic appointment.

1. **Internal evaluation process**

Evaluation was completed by the Researcher Development and Training Manager (RDTM), with input from the Director of Research Environment, the Assistant Director of HR, and the HREiR Oversight and Reference Groups (ORGs), made up of 15 staff with SRR from across the University faculties (see section 3). Our evaluation timeline was affected by the departure of the previous RDTM in late 2022 but we have worked hard to catch up, prioritising CEDARS (in a sector benchmarking year) and reconvening the HREIR ORGs, albeit a little later than in previous years (see table 1).

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| Apr-Jun 23  | CEDARS planning, promotion & delivery. Reconvened HREIR ORGs. |
| July-Aug 2023  | CEDARS analysis (internally and against sector). Review of progress against backward-looking action plan. |
| Sept 2023  | HREIR ORGs review progress against action plan and inform areas for forward-looking action plan.  |
| Oct 2023  | HREiRs item at R&I Committee. Review of all documents by Vitae.  |
| Nov 2023  | HREiRs item at Academic Board and Board of Governors.Review comments from Vitae and finalise documents for submission.  |

*Table 1: Timeline for evaluation and review*

In addition to input from the HREIR ORGs, the views of researchers were collected in the following ways:

* Via CEDARS, which received 160 responses, with an overall completion rate of 14% of staff with SRR, and a completion rate of 17.5% of fixed-term researchers. Respondents were representative of all career stages and academic disciplines with a variety of contractual arrangements.
* Through the ECR Forum, which meets each term and includes representatives from each department.
* Through feedback from the Future RKE Leaders programme.
* Through visits to departments and faculties by the Researcher Development and Training Manager.
* Through 6 focus groups (FGs) with 68 staff. These FGs were primarily linked to our Athena SWAN submission but with clear relevance to RDC/HREiR.
1. **Governance**

The management of R&I activity is overseen by the R&I Committee (RIC) chaired by Professor Nick Brook (Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research) and attended by Directors of Research from each Faculty and key representatives from Professional Services. RIC reports into the University’s Academic Board. Compliance with the Concordat is included in the RIC’s Terms of Reference overseen by the HREiR Oversight Group.

The HREiR ORGs consist of representatives from the R&I Directorate, People and Organisational Development, and 15 staff with SRR including a Research Fellow, a Reader, 11 Senior Lecturers and 2 Lecturers. One third of ORGs members identify as male and one third are people of colour. Membership of the ORGs is voluntary and, so far, we have been unable to recruit a fixed term researcher; but we have prioritised the views of staff who have experiences of being fixed-term researchers either at Manchester Metropolitan or at previous institutions, as well as those who have transitioned from practice to academia.

The HREiR ORGs typically report into RIC twice a year. The RDC and HREiR work intersects with work on Athena SWAN, the Race Equality Charter (REC) and the Research Integrity Concordat and is supplemented and enhanced by these connections, which are leveraged through regular contact between staff working on the different awards, and mapping between the action plans.

1. **Past progress and achievements**

Reflecting on our 2021-2023 action plan, the areas in which we have seen the greatest impact on researchers and staff with SRR includefair and inclusive opportunities for career advancement, recognition for researchers in developing their research identity and leadership, training in ED&I and wellbeing and mental health (WBMH) for managers of researchers, and an increase in days spent on professional development.

**Environment and culture:**

**ECI1: Ensure all relevant staff are aware of the Concordat**

Overall awareness of the Concordat fell slightly in 2023 but there was a significant increase in the proportion of relevant staff taking part in CEDARS. In 2021 and 2022 7% of fixed-term researchers responded to CEDARS. In 2023 this proportion has increased by over 10% to 17.5%, a significant gain in engaging the relevant populations in our RDC, HREiR and related research culture work.

**ECI4: Ensure managers of researchers are effectively trained in ED&I & WBMH**

The EDI team launched a new learning hub and a specialised EDI in leadership programme, ‘Intentional about Inclusion’. 77% of managers of researchers have completed training in ED&I and 50% in WBMH and the number of staff who agree that the University is committed to EDI has increased (CEDARS 2023).

**ECI6: Regularly review and report on the quality of the research environment**We have successfully delivered CEDARS annually for the past 4-years and analysed the results against sector benchmarks. This activity, Athena SWAN/REC focus groups (see section 2), and Research Strategy engagement activities, have built an evidence base that allows us to target improvements to institutional practice towards the areas of the research environment and culture where action is most required, such as collecting specific data on research staff, improving induction and opportunities for mentoring and engaging in institutional decision making (section 5).

**Employment:**

**EI3: Clear, transparent merit-based recognition, reward and promotion**

A greater proportion of respondents agree that the University has fair and inclusive opportunities for career advancement and merit-based promotions, and the proportion of respondents who agree that promotion pathways and processes are clear is 60%, 10% higher than the sector (CEDARS 2023). This reflects work done to establish and promote the REC and EPC Pathways (section 1) and support for this through People Development case studies and the Future RKE Leaders programme.

**EI4: Effective management training opportunities for managers of researchers**

Intentional About Inclusion programme for managers launched by People Development. All managers are required to complete an Inclusive People Management e-learning module. Managers report high confidence in their abilities and there is evidence that this is having a positive impact on staff. 63% of respondents agree that their manager sets appropriate expectations, and 60% gave positive responses in relation to support provided by managers for promotion opportunities compared to a sector benchmark of 55% (CEDARS 2023).

**EI6: Seek to improve job security for researchers**

Less than 10% of our academic staff have fixed-term contracts. As our research environment continues to flourish, with more external research income, we will undertake work to ensure that fixed-term researchers continue to be supported.

**Professional and Career Development:**

**PCDI1: 10 days professional development**

The modal number of days spent on professional development by our researchers has increased from 1-2 to 3-4 days, which is above the sector average (CEDARS 2023). Fixed-term researchers report equity of opportunity (Athena SWAN focus groups). We have clarity over the areas in which our researchers would like training and development which includes managing others, career management, project management, leadership and personal motivation and effectiveness.

**PCDI2: meaningful career development reviews**

48% of respondents have a regular formal career development review with their line manager/supervisor (cf. 38.6% sector benchmark) and 61% reported that the review was useful (CEDARS 2023). This reflects the launch of the Person Centred Conversations for Managers framework, including resources on career conversations, case studies on academic careers, and webinars on running effective academic PDRs. PDR processes that further recognise research ambitions and performance are a key element of the new Research Strategy implementation.

**PCDM4: provide appropriate credit and recognition for researchers’ endeavours in developing their research identity and leadership**

68% of respondents reported that their grant/funding applications were valued in comparison to 60.6% of sector respondents; and 70% said their contributions to research outputs were valued (cf. 65.8% sector; CEDARS 2023). This reflects our work on parity of esteem for research ambitions in career and promotion pathways.

1. **Lessons learned**

The review of our 2021-23 action plan identified some key lessons described below. These have fed into the actions in our 2023-2026 plan (described in section 6).

The impact of our institutional context is significant as we must balance the focus on fixed term research staff required by the Concordat with offering appropriate support to all staff with SRR and the wider academic staff community. Often policies, practice, initiatives and activities intended to support the latter groups also benefit fixed term research staff – but not always. A greater understanding of our research staff and their managers, which can be gained through collecting data specific to these populations and, crucially, by further engagement with these communities, will enable us to better understand their lived experience, requirements and perspectives; for example, in relation to areas highlighted in the 2021-23 plan such as researcher-specific inductions, PDRs and mentoring.

1. **Forward-looking strategic objectives**

The HREiR and Concordat actions in table 2 are drawn from key lessons identified through the review of our 2021-23 action plan (section 5) and mapped to Concordat principles and the aims/objectives of our new Research Strategy. The close mapping will ensure that our 2023-2023 HREiR and Concordat objectives are aligned with the University’s wider strategy and other priorities such as Athena SWAN and the REC.

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| **University strategic aims and objectives** | **HREiR and Concordat action** |
| Concordat Principle: Environment & Culture |
| To drive an innovative and inclusive research culture in which everyone understands and feels valued for their contribution to research. -Increase understanding and value of research through embedding research environment and culture into departments. -Devise ways to increase reward and recognition for research and related activities (cf. career pathways and promotion). | Improve PDRs withparity of esteem for research ambitions in career and promotion pathways.Introduce mechanisms to collect data on research staff as a discrete population (a sub-group of academic staff) so we can disaggregate their responses and report on their engagement, feedback and requirements.Collect further information about managers of researchers so they can support researchers as effectively as possible. |
| Concordat Principle: Employment |
| To support, develop and empower our staff.-Provide further clarity around research career pathways and promotion for research staff and their managers (including training if required).-Ensure equality of opportunity for research staff in relation to reward and recognition.-Review existing development and training opportunities with input from researchers.  | Ensure that institutional policies, practice, initiatives and activities are relevant and accessible to research staff in particular and work to understand the engagement of research staff with these.Improve opportunities for researchers and their managers to inform institutional decisions.Provide an effective induction for every researcher which is relevant to the expectations and opportunities within their role. |
| Concordat Principle: Professional and Career Development |
| To develop the research leaders of the future.-Ensure that all staff understand the available opportunities and resources and how to access them.-Ensure that all research staff have access to a mentoring scheme. | Establish a cross-Faculty mentoring scheme so new and existing researchers are strongly integrated into the research community and culture.Consider taking part in cross-institutional mentoringto improve cross-institutional mobility. |

 *Table 2: Our planned actions mapped to RD Concordat principles and Manchester Met’s strategic priorities*

1. **In summary**

Research at Manchester Metropolitan continues to grow, develop and flourish. The results of REF 2021, to which we submitted the work of 740 staff, and doubled the percentage and volume of work assessed as world-leading, have provided a solid (and more inclusive) foundation from which we are continuing to build our research ambitions. Our new Research Strategy recognises the importance of our People, our Environment and our Culture and is aligned to the commitments of the Concordat.

**Professor Nick Brook, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research**