



# HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH 2 YEAR REVIEW

**Originator:** Graham Curling  
**Date:** October 2019  
**Approved by:** Research Committee  
**Type:** Report

### Introduction and Background

Leeds Arts University gained Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP) in September 2016, followed by our becoming the only specialist arts university in the North of England in August 2017. The institution has sought to develop and grow a research culture based predominantly on practice-based research which can also be linked back to teaching and the student experience. The University joined UK Vitae in March 2016 with the intention of submitting for the HR Excellence in Research Award. The University's Strategic Plan for 2017 - 2023 has a specific thread which relates to research:

***“To continue to develop and progress relevant research practice which enhances teaching and learning, is globally significant and contributes positively to society.***

- *To encourage and support collaborative approaches within our practices.*
- *Through investment, recruitment, support and development to increase our proportion of academic staff who are rated as 2\* and above.*
- *To increase the number and range of collaborations with peer institutions in the UK and globally.*
- *To increase the number of staff qualified to doctorate and masters level who support undergraduate and postgraduate students and increase the number of postgraduate students, particularly through international partnerships.*
- *To advance our libraries, exhibitions and archives capability to support research.”*

As an arts University we do not currently have PHD students or employ postgraduate teaching assistants, and we have nurtured our staff to become active researchers. We have 5 staff on research only contracts and 85 staff on teaching and research contracts. We are submitting for the Research Excellence Framework for the first time in 2021 and have developed and submitted our Research Excellence Framework 2021 Code of Practice. Against this background the University's progress against its Concordat Gap Analysis and Action plan has been scrutinised and monitored by the Research Committee and reported to the Academic Board as has this 2 year review and the action plan for the next 2 years. This review has been written by the Head of HR and Pro-Vice-Chancellor Academic based on this monitoring and feedback from researchers and research active staff which was collected via members of the Research Committee which received reports on progress against the action plan as well as other research related matters. The committee's membership includes the Head of Research, the University Curator, the Research Co-ordinator, and the 2 Research Fellows; and from the Head of Research who has one to 1-1 ongoing discussions with the 5 members of staff who are on research only contracts which allowed for qualitative feedback to be taken into account.

### Key Achievements

Prior to participating in the concordat there were a significant number of areas which were already embedded into the working practices of the University, however as with all processes these are subject to ongoing review. There are also some actions that were not fully achieved within the two years due to the changes within what is a small institution which are referenced above. These will roll forward into the 2019-2021 gap analysis and action plan. There are also some actions which have become embedded in the “business as usual” processes which are showing as completed on that basis.

**Principle 1: Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research.**

The University already worked towards to practices of open merit based recruitment. Key achievements in this area were:

- Research is incorporated into the Strategic Plan 2017-2021 strategic plan as Aim 2 - [http://www.leeds-art.ac.uk/media/117350/leeds-arts-university\\_strategy\\_2017.pdf](http://www.leeds-art.ac.uk/media/117350/leeds-arts-university_strategy_2017.pdf)
- The Recruitment and Selection Procedure was revised in 2017 and can be found [here](#) .
- Unconscious Bias training delivered to those who participate in staff and student recruitment and now forms part of an ongoing rolling programme
- No research roles have been advertised on fixed term contracts since March 2017
- Ongoing training has been provided to all managers involved in staff recruitment

**Principle 2: Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation’s human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research.**

The University only employs 5 staff on research only contracts, however these staff are as essential as any other staff that we employ; and lead the progress of research in the university. Notable achievements against this principle were:

- Head of Research has discussed the Vitae Research Developers Framework with all staff employed on research contracts and it has been used in probationary meetings Policy on salary progression was reviewed and updated in 2017/18

**Principle 3: Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment.**

The University therefore supports all staff in their development and particularly encourages staff on research only or teaching and research contracts to be aware of the global environment of education and research. Key achievements in this area have been:

- Researchers have been encouraged to take part in the Vitae Researcher Development Framework in appraisals.
- The GUILD HE: RESEARCH sandpit project was promoted to all HE academic staff. One Course leader was selected and was successful in gaining research funds to ‘seed’ a project.
- One Research Fellow has been awarded a 2-year Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellowship, which is part of the European Union flagship program for excellent research. From April 2019 to March 2021 they will be working on the project “Alpine Community Economies Lab” in collaboration with EURAC Research (IT) and the Habitat Unit at the Technical University Berlin (DE).
- One of the research team has successfully gained the title of Associate Professor
- Researchers working in different fields are supported, eg, social design, photography and material culture, narrative inquiry and practitioner-based research.
- Researchers are able to take part in CPD that enhances their research skills. Average spend per FTE for staff development for staff on research only contracts in 2018/19 is £1104.

**Principle 4: The importance of researchers’ personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career.**

The approach taken by the University for Principle 4 very much aligns to that of Principle 3 with all staff encouraged to participate in ongoing learning and development in terms of both personal and career development. Notable achievements against this principle were:

- The Research Fellows work with the University’s MA students on a dedicated PG International project which provides them with the opportunity to mentor PG students.
- PG students are invited to research dissemination events, exhibitions and meetings and are encouraged to work with research fellows if appropriate.
- One Research Fellow was appointed to the University’s Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee. This is addition to the existing representation on Academic Board, The Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee, the Final Exam and Progression Board, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and chairs the Ethics Sub Committee. All research staff are eligible to stand for elected academic vacancies with the University’s deliberative structure. In addition the Head of Research also attends 2 standing meetings - that of the Prevent Group and the Marketing, International, Careers and Employability meeting.
- The Head of Research has taken part in the Vitae Mentoring for Researcher Developers Programme pilot as well as notifying the Research Fellows about this opportunity. She was mentored by a professor from the University of Winchester.

**Principle 5: Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning.**

The University's appraisal system - the Annual Progress Review places an emphasis on staff identifying their own personal development needs, alongside any identified by the University. Notable achievements against this principle were:

- Job Descriptions have been kept under review to ensure that they remain relevant and supportive of this principle, recently reviewed in August 2019.
- Enterprise and Impact Training has been sourced and delivered to Researchers and Research Active staff on Teaching and Research Contracts.
- All research proposals are considered by the University's Ethics Sub-Committee (reporting to the University's Research Committee).
- Self-service access to training records on the HR system was launched at the end of 2017

**Principle 6: Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers.**

The University has a long history in promoting and celebrating equality, diversity and inclusion; and as well as specific areas addressed in the Gap Analysis and Action Plan the University's strategic plan has a set of enablers which looks to promote equality, diversity and inclusion. Key achievements in this area have been:

- EDI Policy was updated, approved 5th April 2017 and published both internally and externally.
- The University's inappropriate behaviour policy has been updated and retitled anti bullying and harassment policy. This has been supplemented by behaviours at work training for all staff.
- Equality and Diversity training has been delivered to those staff who will be involved in the Research Excellence Framework submission process.

**Principal 7: The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK.**

The University remains supportive of this principle as can be seen from its actions in other areas of the plan.

### **Going Forward**

Although the University does not yet hold RDAP or has at yet have a validation/franchised arrangements for delivering research degrees, our research ambitions and achievements are significant. The institution has long supported staff in undertaking practice-based research. Despite receiving no dedicated research income, the institution has funded all HE academic staff since 2011 to undertake and develop their research activity and profiles. This forms part of the University's ongoing strategic direction for research going forward which will see the institution submitting to REF2021, a first for the institution.

Over the next few years there is an established plan for the development of research within the institution. It will include building on and enhancing the current research strategy and the development and ultimate approval of the academic case for a validated practice-based PHD through the University Deliberative structure that will lead to the establishment of funded PHD studentships; the enrolment of PHD students and working towards gaining Research Degree Awarding Powers. This aspiration will have the potential to enhance the University's researchers' skills, experience and future career development.

Against these plans the University will be continuing to invest in and support the research ambitions of its staff on research only and on teaching and research contracts as outlined in the updated Concordat Gap Analysis and new 2 year Action plan for the HR Excellence in Research Award which has been considered through the University's deliberative structure and published.