



## **Context of the Institution**

Our Research and Innovation strategic plan sets out Leeds Beckett University (LBU)'s vision to make a decisive and positive impact on people, organisations, and communities through excellence in education, research, and service. Grounded in our core values of ambition, inclusiveness, integrity, teamwork, pragmatism, and purposefulness, our strategic aims include: delivering outstanding educational outcomes, excelling in research and innovation, fostering a diverse community, achieving global engagement, and aligning the organisation sustainably. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) target high continuation, completion and graduate employment rates, enhanced national and international research prominence, impact through our leadership of the Leeds Anchor network, and colleague engagement scores, consistently above benchmarks.

We are committed to achieving research and innovation excellence, guided by our Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation (appointed December 2022) and Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange Services (appointed in November 2023). Our strategic plan is centred on developing globally recognised research expertise, targeting areas where we excel and have a proven track record as well as building interdisciplinary teams that tackle challenges such as obesity and zero carbon buildings. This strategy involves nurturing our academic colleagues as both educators and knowledge creators, fostering a culture of diversity, collaboration, and strategic alignment in research activities. We are committed to bolstering collaborations across schools and with regional and international partners, emphasising the value of research expertise in our targeted areas to enhance innovation and research excellence.

Since our 2022 report, there has been significant progress in improving our research facilities, supporting key subjects such as sport and exercise science, creative and cultural studies, business support, and healthcare. These facilities promote public engagement through collaborative projects and events. LBU has also received the University Mental Health Charter Award in recognition of our commitment to mental health and wellbeing.

The University employs 2800 academic and professional services colleagues based across central services and eight multidisciplinary academic schools, which house 23 research centres. Our primary beneficiaries for HREiR include 210 research staff defined as having the job titles: Research Assistant, Research Officer, (Postdoc) Research Fellow, Senior Research Fellow, Reader, Professor and Director of Research and a portion of our 865 research and teaching staff who have significant responsibility for research or are working towards research independence. Our secondary audience includes 663 Postgraduate Researchers, and 1422 professional support staff of which a portion of these groups will benefit from the action plan but are not within the cohort on which progress will be monitored.

Looking at our researchers up to and including Senior Research Fellows (n=74), 48 of these staff are on fixed-term contracts. Among these, 26 individuals, or 54.2%, have commenced their employment within the last 12 months, reflecting the recent increase in our research funding successes. Notably, 60% (nine out of 15) of our Senior Research Fellows have been promoted internally to their current roles, and 53% (eight out of 15) of our Research Assistants are former LBU students. A strategic focus of the forward plan is to specifically support those on fixed-term contracts, with a particular emphasis on mentorship and professional and career development.

Our Academic Promotions Policy and Procedure sets out the annual process and criteria for the award of professorships and readerships across three routes: i) research route; ii) learning and teaching route; iii) innovation and enterprise route. Since 2017, we have made 41 internal promotions to Professor (46% female, 15% BAME) and 83 internal promotions to Reader (41% female, 19% BAME). Nineteen of the Professors promoted in this period have been Readers promoted through the same internal scheme. We will continue to assess and monitor the Academic Promotions Policy and make improvements to widen the diversity and range of applicants through all pathways.

## **Internal evaluation**

In the internal evaluation and development of our submission, the HREiR working group, led by the PVC for R&I, plays a crucial role. This group, comprising six research staff members across various career stages - including early career researchers (ECRs), mid-career researchers, and research-only staff -

ensures a broad representation of the research community's perspectives and experiences. The working group normally meets bi-annually, facilitating regular reviews and updates to our action plans, ensuring alignment with our strategic goals and the evolving needs of our research staff.

The evaluation was conducted through the following mechanisms, with findings approved by the Research and Enterprise Committee (REC). Our evaluation exercise to measure the success of the 2022-24 action plan and inform the forward action plan took into account:

- a) The annual colleague survey: Annual surveys are crucial for colleague engagement results and outcomes feed into working groups for the Concordat, Athena Swan, and the Race Equality Charter, ensuring a joined-up understanding of colleagues' lived experiences. The survey gathers views on i) colleague engagement ii) sense of team iii) communication iv) leadership and management v) wellbeing vi) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) vii) ways of working, and viii) future focus. The overall University response rate for the 2022 LBU Colleague survey was 61%. We disaggregate this data by School/Service and by Academic/Support staff.
- b) Our Athena Swan Action Plan: <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/our-university/equality-and-inclusion/athena-swan/>
- c) Our Race Equality Action Plan: <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/our-university/equality-and-inclusion/race-equality-charter/>
- d) Improvement plans linked to our University Mental Health Charter Award.
- e) In the CEDARS 2023 survey, our analysis achieved a nuanced understanding by disaggregating the 316 responses, of which 21.8% were from research-focused staff or those mainly engaged in research activities. By examining data across various aspects - such as career stage, management roles, academic discipline, gender, and ethnicity, to name a few examples – we have been able to uncover specific needs and experiences within our research community, thereby informing more tailored and effective support strategies.
- f) Our Workforce Plan to support a diverse community of talented and engaged colleagues to deliver our purpose and achieve their potential.
- g) Feedback and information from our Directors of Research, HR and Library researcher support team, the Research Information and Governance (RIG) team and wider colleagues within the Research and Enterprise team.
- h) Feedback from research colleagues attending our training and development courses and events, such as the Festival of Research and Knowledge Exchange (Nov 2023).
- i) Collaboration between our People and Organisational Development (POD) team with researchers and academics around how best to support them.

## Governance structures

Our University's governance structure includes the Board of Governors, the Academic Board, and executive groups supporting the Vice Chancellor. Professor Silke Machold, PVC for R&I, integral to the University Executive Team, has ultimate responsibility for the HREiR action plan, with the REC overseeing its execution. The HREiR working group, reflecting a broad spectrum of research staff, contributes directly to this process, presenting its findings to the REC annually, aligning with the Researcher Development Concordat's annual report. Further, researchers are represented on the Academic Board, Promotion Panel, and the Charter Mark Group, which addresses Athena Swan, REC, and mental health, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive governance structure.

## Past Progress and achievements

### Environment and Culture

**Achievement of Race Equality Charter Bronze Award (February 2023) (ECI2/ECM1):** The Race Equality Charter offers a framework to address racial inequalities and advance diversity in higher education. Focusing on long-term cultural change and the unique experiences of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic individuals, it recognises LBU's efforts towards racial equality and highlights areas for continued improvement. This achievement, led by the Race Equality Self-Assessment Team under Deputy Vice Chancellor Tracey Lancaster, demonstrates our commitment to inclusivity. To build upon this momentum, LBU launched a Combined Charter Mark Group, led by the PVC for R&I aimed at integrating action plans and ensuring continuous progress and evaluation for the Race Equality Charter, Athena Swan and the Mental Health Charter.

**Retention of Athena Swan Award (submission May 2022) (ECI2/ECM1):** The Athena Swan Charter is an international framework committed to transforming gender equality within higher education and research. Established in 2005, it initially focused on advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths, and medicine (STEMM) fields. It has since expanded globally to address gender equality more broadly and not just barriers to progression affecting women. LBU's commitment to the Athena Swan Charter principles signifies joining a global community dedicated to addressing gender inequalities and fostering inclusive cultures. The University's commitment can be viewed here: <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/our-university/equality-and-inclusion/athena-swan/>

**University Mental Health Charter Award (ECI3/ECM3):** LBU received the award in Spring 2023 and is one of only seven universities in the country to receive the University Mental Health Charter Award, recognising our commitment to continuous improvement in mental health and wellbeing. This voluntary programme, developed in collaboration with colleagues and students, aims to create a university environment that supports the mental wellbeing of all its members. By aligning with the Charter's principles, the University endeavours to enhance awareness, reduce stigma, and ensure compassionate support for mental health issues. The initiative represents a holistic strategy, recognising mental health as integral to academic and personal success. We actively involved the university community in our journey towards Charter status, signifying a collective commitment to becoming a mentally healthy university.

**Enhanced Research Governance and Transparency (ECI5/ECR2):** We established a dedicated team overseeing R&KE policies and practices, demonstrating our commitment to transparency. We also launched an awareness campaign, leading to increased web traffic and showcasing effective communication with our research community. REC approved the LBU Statement of Responsible Research Metrics, reaffirming our commitment to ethical research assessment and responsible practices.

**Positive Feedback in CEDARS 2023 Survey (ECI5/ECM2):** The CEDARS survey results demonstrate a strong awareness and perception of the University's commitment to research integrity, with a significant majority of respondents acknowledging LBU's efforts in promoting research integrity and conduct.

#### Employment

**New 'Managers' Essentials' Webpage Launched (EI4/EM1):** This webpage provides essential information for new and existing managers at LBU, covering areas such as recruitment, development, PDRs, flexible working and wellbeing. New managers have the option to be paired with a mentor from our internal network and service will be expanded in our forward plan to cater specifically to the needs of research managers.

**Launch of 'Welcome to Leeds Beckett University – Connecting our Community' (EI2):** This in-person session is part of our induction pathway and gives new colleagues the opportunity to meet other new colleagues from across all areas of the University for a lively session to network, share thoughts and experiences and explore the values which unite us (so far around 30% of attendees are academic colleagues). This forms part of our wider induction, which includes a local induction, an online induction session with a welcome talk from our Vice Chancellor, campus tours, an EDI online module and signposting to academic/ researcher development opportunities.

**Involvement in Policy Development and Decision-making (EI7/EM5):** The creation of R&KE Sub-Committees in each of the eight schools, chaired by the DoR and including researchers and managers of researchers, signifies a positive step towards inclusive policy development.

#### Professional development

##### **Launch of Leeds Beckett Equity and Inclusion Research Fund and Programme**

(ECM1/PCD11/PCD14): Now in its third round, this initiative proactively supports research projects that will have positive EDI benefits, for example through assisting with promotion potential for colleagues from a group currently under-represented at senior academic levels, enabling individuals to gain research momentum following a career break, or undertaking research activity that will benefit

underserved or marginalised individuals or communities. In 2022, £150,000 funded 15 projects. In 2023, 12 projects were funded with an additional £80,000 made available for applications. This included funding specifically for follow-on activity allocated to researchers who had been successful the previous year.

**Festival of Research and Knowledge Exchange (PCDI3):** The 2023 Festival of R&KE was successfully delivered, attracting over 650 registrations, and served as a pivotal event for researcher development. Centred around the theme 'Responsible and Responsive Research and Knowledge Exchange', the five-day event offered attendees a diverse programme of sessions providing insights and practical advice on topics such as the next REF, trusted research practices, KE, open research and research impact. It also featured unique events and workshops, fostering a space for the university community to engage and share best practice, celebrate research achievements, and encouraged collaboration and networking.

**Enhancing Research Identity and Leadership (PCDI4):** Dedicated training programmes, such as Research Identity and the Research Team Leadership Programmes, demonstrate our commitment to developing researchers' management and leadership skills. Involvement in the Media and Culture Assembly and support for school-specific fellowship schemes are also notable achievements in this area.

### Strategic Objectives and Implementation

Building on our strategic vision for a significant positive impact through research and innovation, articulated in our Strategic Planning Framework, the forthcoming Academy for Research and Knowledge Exchange, championed by the PVC for R&I and the Director of R&KE, embodies our commitment to research excellence. This initiative, rooted in our core values and strategic aims, aims to elevate LBU's research prominence nationally and internationally, aligning with our KPIs. The Academy will provide a structured development programme, tailored to nurture the diverse talents of our research-active colleagues, ensuring alignment with the Concordat's principles, and reinforcing our dedication to responsible, high-quality research. Informed by insights from recent surveys and our strategic planning, this central hub will further our vision by supporting researchers at all career stages, particularly those on fixed-term contracts, fostering a culture of inclusivity, collaboration, and strategic growth in our key research areas.

The key focus and priorities of our forward action plan are as follows:

#### Environment and Culture

**Concordat Awareness and Integration:** Our commitment continues to embed the Concordat's principles. We aim to ensure widespread awareness among all staff by utilising a variety of channels and incorporating these principles into our training programmes. A focused review of academic staff PDR resources is scheduled for the 2024 cycle, with an emphasis on research colleagues. This review will prominently feature the Concordat as a key reference, alongside resources specifically tailored to facilitate career development discussions.

**Transparent and Inclusive Policy Communication:** We will launch a broad communication strategy to increase awareness and understanding of institutional policies in Autumn 2024. This includes organising dedicated workshops, establishing feedback mechanisms, and creating EDI Action Plans with specific KPIs for each school or service to ensure policies are equitable, transparent, and effectively communicated to all researchers and their managers.

**Research Environment and Culture Audit:** A comprehensive audit will be conducted to assess and improve the research environment and culture at LBU. Post-audit, an aligned action plan with CEDARS will be developed, focusing on inclusivity, collaboration, resources, work-life balance, and support systems, with feedback from diverse focus groups to inform policy changes and institutional practices.

**Engagement in Organisational Policy and Decision-making:** We are committed to enhancing the involvement of researchers and their managers in policy development aiming to amplify diverse voices and ensure policies are shaped by those who are actively involved in research and management. This includes the development of 'Research Insights Roundtable' events, a week-long event on policy

training, engagement and sharing information on successful policy-informed impact case studies, consultation with the Professoriate group as well as increased participation in relevant school committees.

**Strategic Implementation of Narrative CV Approaches:** We are set to develop and pilot the use of narrative CV formats and through this approach, acknowledge and celebrate the wide-ranging contributions of our researchers to both the development of others and the broader R&KE community. This strategic initiative extends across various sections of our action plan, encompassing commitments within employment as well as professional and career development. By adopting this method, we aim to comprehensively showcase our researchers' multifaceted achievements, promoting a broader and more inclusive understanding of individual contributions beyond conventional metrics.

**Mental Health Training for All Colleagues:** Linked to our University Mental Health Charter Award improvement plan, we will design and launch an all-colleague mental health online training course as part of induction for all staff. The module will include mental health, self-care, and supporting others, and we will monitor the percentage increase in knowledge and confidence about talking about mental health.

### Employment

**Inclusive Recruitment and Promotion:** Our commitment to inclusive and transparent recruitment will focus on a review of research staff roles and structures, ensuring alignment with our strategic aims. Although we are yet to formally become signatories to DORA/CoARA principles, we are evaluating how these frameworks could enhance our commitment to equitable and inclusive recruitment and promotion. We also aim to join the UK Reproducibility Network, affirming our commitment to exemplary research standards, to cultivating a diverse and vibrant academic community and how these feeds into recruitment and promotion criteria.

**Enhanced Induction for Research Integration:** Central to our forward plan is the launch of a Research Mentoring Programme, which will pair new researchers with seasoned mentors. This initiative aims to cultivate a nurturing and interconnected research community, bolstered by the creation of resources designed to aid both mentors and their mentees.

**Development of a Holistic Definition of LBU Academic:** We are developing a broad definition of an LBU Academic, encompassing activities connected to teaching, research, and citizenship. This initiative aims to align with wider institutional goals and will set expectations and support professional development reviews and career aspirations.

### Professional Development

**Researcher Development Programme and Pathways:** As part of the development and strategy of the R&KE Academy, a comprehensive development programme will be launched. This programme, co-created with academics, will aim to support colleagues in reaching their full potential in research, innovation, and collaboration and ensuring consistent communication and easy visualisation of a wide range of development opportunities. Concurrently, the Academy will design and implement tailored development pathways, adapted for different career stages, blending online and in-person workshops, seminars, and mentorship opportunities.

**Enhancing Professional Development Recording for Researchers:** In our commitment to supporting researchers' professional growth, we are looking at methods to enhance the recording of their professional and career development activities. Recognising that researchers' progress extends beyond attendance at training and development sessions, our approach will encompass a more holistic view and may include capturing diverse forms of professional advancement, such as informal learning, collaborative projects, and self-directed research initiatives.

**Career Development Support for Researchers and Managers:** We will develop a multi-faceted approach to boosting career development for researchers and their managers. This includes developing a training programme to equip managers with the skills needed for effective performance and career development reviews. Additionally, we will organise regular workshops and seminars focused on career management skills, transferability, and progression.