



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): In Spring 2023, LBU became one of only seven universities in the country to receive the University Mental Health Charter Award. This accolade recognises our commitment to continuous improvement in mental health and wellbeing. Developed collaboratively with colleagues and students, this voluntary programme aims to foster an environment that supports the mental wellbeing of all its members. By aligning with the Charter's principles, we strive to enhance awareness, reduce stigma, and provide compassionate support for mental health issues. This holistic strategy underscores mental health as integral to academic and personal success, reflecting our 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/PCDI1/PCDI4): 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. Specific impact measures and associated actions are detailed in the action plan.

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

Environment and Culture

Concordat Awareness and Integration: Our commitment to embedding the Concordat's principles continues, aiming for widespread staff awareness through various channels and integration into training programmes. A 2024 review of academic staff PDR resources will focus on research colleagues, prominently featuring the Concordat with tailored career development resources. Success will be reflected in widespread understanding and integration of the Concordat's principles, evidenced by increased engagement and positive feedback. By 2025, a significant majority of research-focused staff will have an understanding of the Concordat. Annual focus groups in 2025 and 2026 will confirm the effectiveness of these efforts, demonstrating continuous improvement.

Transparent and Inclusive Policy Communication: We will launch a comprehensive communication strategy to increase awareness and understanding of institutional policies. This includes workshops, feedback mechanisms, and EDI Action Plans with specific KPIs for each school or service, ensuring policies are equitable, transparent, and effectively communicated. Success will be demonstrated by increased digital interactions with policy content, positive workshop feedback, significant knowledge improvement, and effective application of insights. Constructive feedback through new channels will rise, with a marked increase in staff agreement on the institution's value of their contributions to policy-making.

Research Environment and Culture Audit: A comprehensive audit will be conducted to assess and improve the research environment and culture at LBU. Following the audit, an action plan aligned 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. Success will mean a well-documented and widely recognised improvement in the research environment and culture, with active participation from the majority of staff. Feedback mechanisms will be embedded into regular practice, ensuring continuous enhancement. An established ECR network will thrive with significant engagement, and contributions to research culture will be integral to promotion criteria.

Engagement in Organisational Policy and Decision-making: We are committed to enhancing the involvement of researchers and their managers in policy development to amplify diverse voices and ensure policies are shaped by those actively involved in research and management. This includes 'Research Insights Roundtable' events, policy training, engagement sessions, consultations with the Professoriate group, and increased participation in school committees. Success will be seen through regular consultation sessions with the Professoriate group, greater researcher representation in committees, and expanded engagement in roundtable events. Documented feedback will show how policies have been shaped by these inputs, and a network of researchers will actively contribute to policy discussions across all career stages, leading to positive, well-documented changes and improvements.

Strategic Implementation of Narrative CV Approaches: We will develop and pilot narrative CV formats to highlight the wide-ranging contributions of our researchers, promoting a broader and more inclusive understanding of individual achievements. Success will mean widespread adoption of narrative CVs, with at least 50% of researchers using them and positive feedback on their effectiveness. Guidelines and training will be developed, with strong participation, especially from those on fixed-term contracts. Career management workshops will be well-attended and highly rated, leading to improved knowledge and application of skills. Integration of narrative CV insights will enhance recognition processes, and feedback will show a more holistic

understanding of candidates' achievements.

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 staff induction. The module will cover mental health, self-care, and supporting others. Success will mean increased knowledge and confidence in discussing mental health. Regular assessments will show improved wellbeing conversations and targeted support for those needing additional training. Feedback will indicate a positive impact on the university's mental health culture, with sustained knowledge and confidence over time.

Employment

Inclusive Recruitment and Promotion: We are committed to inclusive and transparent recruitment, focusing on reviewing research staff roles and structures to align with our strategic aims. While not yet formal signatories to DORA/CoARA principles, we are evaluating these frameworks to enhance equitable recruitment and promotion. Additionally, we aim to join the UKRN, affirming our commitment to high research standards and a diverse academic community. Success will involve completion of review and stack take of research roles, improved diversity, widespread best practice awareness among senior staff, and integrated robust research practices in recruitment guidelines.

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. Success will be evidenced by high satisfaction rates from participants, effective use of mentorship resources, and comprehensive coverage of university policies and practices in the induction programme. Feedback from surveys and focus groups will show successful integration of new researchers into the university community.

Development of a Holistic Definition of LBU Academic: We are developing a broad definition of an LBU Academic, encompassing teaching, research, and citizenship, to align with institutional goals and support professional development and career aspirations. Success will be a clear outline of roles and responsibilities published for the 2024 academic year. This will guide professional reviews, support career aspirations, and ensure equitable advancement, enhancing diversity and recognition of all researchers' contributions.

Professional Development

Researcher Development Programme and Pathways: As part of the R&KE Academy's strategy, we will launch a comprehensive development programme to help colleagues achieve their full potential in research, innovation, and collaboration. This programme, co-created with academics, will offer a clear view of diverse development opportunities and implement tailored pathways for different career stages, including online and in-person workshops, seminars, and mentorship. Success will mean the R&KE Academy's foundation and strategy are established, with significant engagement in new development activities. High satisfaction rates and positive feedback will confirm the effectiveness of these initiatives, with researchers reporting meaningful support for their career progression.

Enhancing Professional Development Recording for Researchers: In our commitment to supporting researchers' professional growth, we aim to enhance the recording of their professional and career development activities. Recognising that progress extends beyond formal training sessions, our approach will capture diverse forms of advancement, such as informal learning, collaborative projects, and self-directed research. Success will involve implementing a structured system within Symplectic Elements to record and track these activities. Following a feasibility study and proposal approval, this system will be in place by the end of Year 2, with significant researcher engagement by Year 3, providing a transparent method for documenting career progression.

Career Development Support for Researchers and Managers: We will enhance career development for researchers and managers through comprehensive training for effective performance reviews, interdisciplinary research mentoring, and leveraging external development opportunities. Regular workshops and seminars will focus on career management, skills transferability, and progression. Success will be seen in improved managerial capacity for career reviews, increased interdisciplinary mentoring, and greater awareness and use of external opportunities, with researchers and managers reporting significant knowledge gains, practical application of training insights, and satisfaction with the support provided.