

**HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH: TWO-YEAR INTERNAL REVIEW
(November 2019 – November 2021)**

1. Introduction

Excellence in research underpins all of Royal Holloway's activities and aspirations. We produce world-leading research that substantially advances the knowledge base, enabling positive impacts for individuals, society, and the environment. We deliver education for undergraduate and postgraduate students that is informed by the highest standards of research and scholarship.

We recognise that we have a responsibility to deliver excellent outcomes in respect of the public investment that underpins our work and to support our staff and students. In doing so, our work is driven by core research commitments and values such as academic freedom, advancing and sharing knowledge, openness, integrity, ethical standards, mutual respect, and equality, diversity and inclusion.

The College continues to define researchers as individuals who are employed to conduct research or scholarship and who would be expected to develop their research identity as part of their career progression. This includes staff on research only, teaching and research, teaching-focused or professional practice contracts, professional support staff and technicians, regardless of contract type, level of training, experience and responsibility. Our REF 2021 submission demonstrated our commitment to including a diversity of staff in outputs, impact case studies and research environment statements. A similar inclusive definition is applied to Early Career Researchers, allowing individuals to opt in to the definition regardless of their role.

2. Institutional Context 2019 - 21

Royal Holloway first achieved the HR Excellence in Research Award in November 2019. The covid-19 pandemic began in the immediate aftermath, and the impact of this has been disruption to our normal cycles of work, as well as a change to our institutional focus and strategic direction. Prior to the pandemic, the College had begun consulting on a 10-year strategy. This was curtailed in March 2020 to allow space for the College to develop its flexible education offering for 2020-21, and to respond to the needs of students and staff.

A 3-year strategic plan covering key priorities was agreed by our Council in October 2020. Developing strategies for people, EDI and environmental sustainability were postponed until the spring of 2021, and work is now underway to develop strategic themes and priorities in these areas.

The 3-year strategic plan for research is focused on developing a number of significant strengths which can catalyse a College-wide strength in challenge-led research. Four themes have been chosen as the initial priorities:

- Digital futures in the creative and cultural sectors
- Sustainable places, thriving societies
- Advanced quantum science and technologies
- Transformative digital technologies for a sustainable digital society.

These are designated as "catalyst" themes in recognition that they are intended to be influential in stimulating the culture and support processes for challenge-led research more broadly.

Delivery of the action plan for HR Excellence in Research, as defined in 2019, has been affected by the circumstances and substantial change that has taken place at the College since we achieved the award. It has been possible to progress some of the activities originally highlighted, but many others need to be carried forward or re-evaluated. Our internal review (carried out in late summer and early autumn 2021) indicated that these circumstances have also had a significant impact on our researchers, their time and their capacity to develop research, and mitigating this impact will form part of our action plan.

3. Internal Review Process

At Royal Holloway, HR Excellence in Research has a working group which is chaired by the Senior Vice-Principal (Academic Strategy and Research). This includes Early Career Researcher representatives from four of the College's six academic schools as well as one of our school Directors of Research. Research & Innovation, HR Operations, Organisational Development, Educational Development and Library Services are also represented. Feedback for the review was gathered from focus groups that had taken place within a number of academic schools during the two-year period. In September 2021 we ran Vitae's Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) and held focus groups with Early Career Researchers on key issues identified by the Working Group.

4. Key Achievements and Progress 2019 – 2021

The key achievements and progress since our initial self-assessment are outlined below. The outcome and impact of specific actions identified can be seen on our action plan review.

Recruitment and Selection (Principle 1)

- In 2020, a new Recruitment and Selection policy was drafted to incorporate the changes identified through the action plan. The draft needs to be reworked to include changes to our recruitment methods in response to both Brexit and the pandemic.
- Balanced recruitment panels are proposed where realistically possible. This is encouraged rather than mandated to avoid pressure on specific groups of staff.
- Generic role descriptions and person specifications are available for recruiting managers on the online recruitment system and via the HR webpages to improve information and consistency for candidates and to ensure consistency of College grades and pay
- Work is ongoing to improve the look and feel of the recruitment system to make it easier for all to use, and functionality to check for gender neutrality has now been introduced.

Recognition and Value (Principle 2)

- There is increased emphasis and guidance for managers in following the redeployment process. There is also more awareness of when it is appropriate to use a fixed term contract, and the number of fixed term contracts used in our research community fell by 4% between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Support and Career Development (Principles 3, 4 and 5)

- Our Code of Good Research Practice has been updated and publicised through internal communications and training activities. It is also highlighted in the information pack given to new academic and research staff. Research integrity is now a standing item on the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee agenda.
- Research integrity has been embedded into the core training for new/early career researchers, and we have improved our online resources on integrity (research culture) and ethics. We have designed and delivered research ethics training for postgraduate researchers and opened this to all levels of research staff through a new subscription with Epigeum for PGR ethics training.
- We have set up a task and finish group to address processes around bullying and harassment and research funding, raising awareness of bullying and harassment in research and the routes to follow to report issues. This is awaiting sign-off and this year there will be a programme of awareness raising.
- The new Advance Programme for researcher development was implemented in September 2019, with workshops grouped into four themes - Research Skills, Developing your Research Proposal, Collaboration, Knowledge Exchange and Impact and Becoming a Research Leader.
- All Advance programme workshops were moved online with the advent of covid-19. In 2019 - 2020, 24 workshops were delivered and there were 203 researcher attendances, resulting in an occupancy rate of 85% on average for each workshop. In 2020-21, 39 workshops were delivered, with 376 researcher attendances resulting in an occupancy rate of 75% for each workshop. The improvement target for 2021/22 will be an occupancy rate of 80% from 38 scheduled workshops.

- In June 2021, thirteen early career researchers from a variety of levels and disciplines were enlisted on Advance HE accredited development programmes in teaching and learning at RHUL, that lead to professional recognition with HEA Fellowships or Associate Fellowships.
- A new suite of training courses on becoming a research leader has been introduced on the Advance Programme. Sessions have been held on what research leadership means, with key messages including the need for mentoring, enabling rather than formal training, bridging the gap between leading an internal research group and leading across multiple partners.
- Advance programme workshops are regularly communicated via the staff newsletter and intranet. Direct email has also been used for communication with ECRs, and meetings held with ECR representatives. Communication and engagement has been challenging often leading to lower take up, and we are aware that our ECRs are eager to protect squeezed research time.
- Local induction processes have been reviewed in consultation with School Managers. Induction checklists have been simplified and more self-guided information has been issued.
- ECR representation on school committees has been implemented and developed.

Diversity and Equality (Principle 6)

- Each Academic School now has an EDI Director, whose role is to ensure that EDI is integrated throughout the work of the school.
- New policies have been published for adoption/surrogacy, parental bereavement leave and shared parental leave. A new remote working policy was also published early last year. Parental leave and paternity leave policies are currently under review, and work is ongoing to update and expand policies on a range of other types of leave, for example career breaks. A new hybrid working policy is nearing completion and should be in place for the start of 2022.
- Two further departments and one school have achieved the Athena swan award.

Implementation and Review (Principle 7)

- ECR Forums have been set up in most academic schools, and feedback on research environment and culture is regularly requested and received.

5. Next Steps and Strategic Focus – 2021-23

The following draft priorities will be at the heart of our new People Strategy:

- **Royal Holloway will be a place for potential to thrive**, bringing new ideas and innovation into our work and inspiring individuals to succeed.
- **Our shared goals will be achieved through diversity and diverse perspectives** – we are strengthened by the engagement and inclusivity of difference.
- **Strengthened leadership and management** will take us forward to achieve our ambitions
- **Our organisational capability will be maximised** – through clear roles, simple processes and accountable actions.

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers provides a framework through which we can review our practices and target action in relation to the specific needs of our research community. Aligning with the People Strategy priorities, the strategic outcomes we seek through our HR Excellence in Research action plan in 2021-2023 will be to ensure that

- our **early career researchers** successfully develop their research identity, navigate role uncertainty and build successful careers
- researchers **maximise time** available for research and development
- **research leaders and managers** are inspiring and effective in leading their teams to success
- our **research environment and culture is positive, outwardly aware and focused**, enabling all researchers to flourish and achieve their full potential
- **learning and development** opportunities for researchers are effective, valued and maximised
- the **impact of covid-19** on research work and careers is mitigated.

All of the actions within our plan link to achieving these outcomes, and these will enable us to develop the strengths and capacity needed for our research strategy.