UNIVERSITY OF CUMBRIA

EU HR Excellence in Research: Eight Year Review

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1. Introduction

The University of Cumbria is committed to holding the EU HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) and has held the award for the past 8 years. Our 6-year review was appraised as the HE sector continued to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. During the last 18 months, there has been significant changes in our senior leadership, which has impacted the 22-24 action plan progress resulting in some actions carrying forward. The main staff changes involved:

HR/People and Culture   • Head of HR – left November 2022   • Director of People and Culture – started September 2023
Research and Knowledge Exchange   • Interim Head of Knowledge Exchange – left January 2023   • Interim Head of Research – left February 2023   • Head of Research and Knowledge Exchange – started October 2023

The new People and Culture (P&C) Strategy has also been developed (due to be published in Spring 2024) and has been through many phases including world café workshops, Padlets and consultations. The new Director of P&C will implement this and associated workstreams. Key themes (T) within the P&C strategy are as follows:

T1: Nurturing & evolving our culture: Developing a cultural roadmap. **T2:** Develop a distinct & compelling employee value proposition (EVP).	**T3:** Workforce planning: developing future Academics, Leaders, & professional services - performance/development **T4:** Change management & innovation
Cross cutting themes (CC): Wellbeing, EDI, and Engagement	

The P&C Strategy underpins/supports the University T2030 strategic plan where the aims are: 1) to fulfil our local and global roles and ambition; 2) to positively impact on our students; 3) to increase higher education participation in our county; 4) to address higher-level skills and sector needs; 5) to co-create and apply new knowledge and 6) to positively embrace our civic responsibilities through our students and graduates; our academic and applied research focus; people, practice & place. These aims are informed by cross-cutting themes covering:

Digital	Sustainability & Carbon Reduction	Health & wellbeing	Partnerships

The recently launched RKE plan aims to grow our research activities including application of expertise at local and national levels, structured around the following six pillars:

1: Research Capacity & Capability	**4:** Financial Sustainability
2: Research Quality	**5:** Doctoral Students
3: Knowledge Exchange Relationships	**6:** Postgraduate Research Experience

Our developing internal landscape has paused some larger projects, impacting the progress of some areas of the action plan. However, with the launch of the P&C strategy, items carried forward have been incorporated in line with this and the overarching T2030 strategy. We have also sought to implement and update our Action Plan in support of the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers. Our academic staffing comprises of 457 (376.52 FTE) academic posts with this group the main beneficiaries of our implementation of the Concordat.

Staff group	Number of	Full time equivalent (FTE)
Research staff	1	1
Research and teaching staff	434	354.53 FTE
Technicians	30	23.21 FTE

Postgraduate researchers	114	N/A
Professional support staff	545	463.66 FTE
Other	22	21.2 FTE

Table 1. Staff body demographics.

Governance Structure
The implementation and monitoring of our Action Plan takes place via our HREiR Steering Group, with representatives from HR, Research & Knowledge Exchange (RKE) and input from academic staff as described in Table 2.

Individual	Staff Group
Senior Lecturer in Education	**Research and Teaching**
Lecturer in Dance	
Research and Knowledge Exchange Officer	**Research and Knowledge Exchange**
Senior Research Officer – Development	
Head of Research and Knowledge Exchange	
Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange	
HR Business Partner - Wellbeing	**HR**
Director of People and Culture	
HR Advisor	
Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Officer	

Table 2. HREIR Steering Group Membership.

The Steering Group reports to the *RKE Committee (RKEC),* which has overall responsibility of this group and is Chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. Membership includes Directors and staff representatives from University Institutes, Directors of Research Centres and key RKE and Library Services staff. Overall responsibility for HREiR sits with the Director of RKE.

2. Overall Process for Conducting the Eight Year Review
Significant staffing and resource limitations were seen in RKE/HR during 2023, therefore the 8-year review process was proportionate to the resources available. Recent voluntary severance schemes also needed a sensitive approach to involving staff in the review process.

The review was led by the HREiR Steering Group, specifically the Senior Research Officer – Development, and HR Business Partner - Wellbeing. Our process involved:

- HREiR Steering Group held meetings 23/24 to review action plan (Aug 23 – Jan 24)
- Consultation and feedback from EDI Officer on the action plan (Dec 23 – Jan 24).
- Feedback from associated areas i.e. Centre for Academic Practice Enhancement.
- Consultation - research active staff to comment on action plan (Nov 23 – Jan 24.).
- Aligned to P&C workshop feedback ensuring strategic fit and to the T2030 Strategy
- Consultation with leaders – Director of P&C, Director of RKE and Head of RKE.
- RKE Committee agenda slot to raise awareness of HRIER activity/action plan.
- Action plan senior leadership sign: RKE Committee Chair - Deputy Vice Chancellor

3. Involving Researchers in the Process

We endeavoured to involve researchers in the review process, whilst understanding the pressures related to voluntary severance schemes, and feedback from the P&C workshops. Our engagement therefore targeted staff on research and teaching contracts (the majority academic demographic); 1 member of staff holds a research only contract. The process involved:
- A series of meetings with 2 research active staff to gather feedback, and to understand their priorities and concerns relating to matters within the scope of the HREIR award.

- Updating researchers on the progress of the submission via the RKE Committee.
- Using key data from P&C workshops and staff survey to pinpoint where possible comments relating to staff engaged in research.

4. Key Achievements and Action Plan Progress

4.1 General Achievements

Environment and Culture:

- RKE Strategic Plan: launched October 23 and supports RKE growth/impact aligned to the T2030 strategy.
- November 23: RKE launched the Epigeum Research Impact: Creating Meaning and Value (RI:CMV) online course for researchers.
- Research Ethics Panel: increased membership to reflect a wider range of academic disciplines. New membership includes colleagues from four for our five academic institutes, and the RKE Directorate.
- September 23: Institute of the Arts (now the Institute of Education, Arts and Society) received Enhancing Research Culture funding to support a REF learning session with Professor Juan Cruz of Edinburgh College of Art and REF Sub-Panel Deputy Chair for UoA34.
- 2022: For the first time since 2019, we offered an in-person writing retreat, and two virtual retreats. Positive feedback from staff and PGRs detailed that the retreats are seen as a supportive, focused environment and valuable for ECRs. RKE have implemented 23/24 additional in-person 1-day retreats alongside new virtual Writing Cafes for wider attendance. Overall enrolment has increased for 22/23 compared to 21/22.
- Research Centres and Networks continue to support and develop an inclusive and collegiate research culture. The Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas (CNPPA) and the Centre for Research in Health and Society (CRiHS) circulate newsletters detailing research achievements, activities, funding opportunities, relevant sector news and events. Learning, Education and Development (LED) centre hosted the International Charlotte Mason Centenary conference and increased its number of 'lightning talks' to disseminate research.

Professional Development:

- 2022: RKE reviewed the Professorial Criteria Routes to enhance the criteria/process. Guidance produced, and development sessions offered to academic staff to enable better understanding of the criteria to allow informed decisions about application.

Employment:

- Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) launched to ensure policies, practices and processes are fair, meet the needs of staff and students and do not unlawfully discriminate against any protected characteristic. Support is now available for colleagues completing an EIA, via an internal (StaffHub) webpage, example EIAs, and drop-in clinics led by EDI Officer.

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Wellbeing:

- Gender pay gap (March 23) positive. Mean gap reduced by 3% to 10.1% (sector 13.7%). Median reduced by 2.7% to 8.4% (sector 17.1%) since 2022.
- 2022: Awarded Disability Confident Leader and joined the sunflower lanyard scheme.
- 2022: White Ribbon Accredited (movement to end men's violence against women).
- 2022: Two new networks: Parents/carers (22 members), Menopause (81 members).
- 2022: Launch of a wellbeing champions/supporters' network (58 members, 21 Champions) with a training programme on suicide awareness, mental health first aid, healthy lifestyles, mental/physical health to support the health and wellbeing action plan.

4.2 Key 2022-2024 Action Plan Achievements

- April 2023: Awarded Athena Swan Bronze.
- New Research Ethics and Integrity external webpage live. StaffHub pages now include resources on research impact, Research Ethics FAQ page, and resources on University's Publisher Open Access Agreements, bid feedback/resources, and parliamentary/policy impact engagement opportunities.
- UKRI funding streams included specific calls to encourage Early Career Researcher (ECR) involvement. In AY 21-22, 11 projects were funded by an in-year UKRI allocation:
    - Knowledge Exchange Fund: 7 projects, ECRs as PI or project team member.
    - Policy Support Fund: 2 projects, 1 of involved ECRs as project team members.
    - Participatory Research Fund: 2 projects, 1 led by an ECR PI.
- Senior RKE Officer (Post Award Finance) joined in 2023 to support contract management and adherence.
- Wellbeing action plan launched. Online hub showcased at the Sector Wellbeing Network with 127 attending institutions.
- Research and Scholarly Activity guidance is being updated to reflect a broader range of activity and harmonised with professorial titles guidelines to more accurately present pathways, recognition, and reward.

Employment:
- Staff/student sexual misconduct policy agreed/launched with guidance, and support.
- Flexible working policy reviewed to allow easy access to procedures and information.

5. Next Steps and Strategy Focus 2024-2027
The next 3 years centre on detailed analysis, planning and dissemination of the 2019 Concordat; using the RKE Plan and P&C strategy as follows:

5.1 Environment and culture	
Activity	*Link to institutional strategy/initiative/Theme (T)*
Assess our readiness to become a formal signatory of the revised Concordat.	**RKE Plan** Crosscutting
Develop our research culture programme of training and engagement opportunities.	**RKE Plan** T1: Research Capacity & Capability T2: Research Quality T5: Doctoral Students T6: Postgraduate Research Experience
Continue to engage with institutes to promote the RKE Directorate offer and increase academic engagement with the service.	**RKE Plan** Crosscutting
Refresh research ethics policy & implement research integrity training to aid researchers to maintain and promote high standards of professional conduct	**RKE Plan** T1: Research Capacity & Capability T2: Research Quality

5.2 Employment	
Activity	*Link to institutional strategy/initiative/Theme (T)*
RKE element of induction for new staff to support awareness of key RKE processes and quality measures (including the principles outlined in the Concordat).	**RKE Plan** T1: Research Capacity & Capability T2: Research Quality T3: Knowledge Exchange Relationships T4: Financial Sustainability

Continue the development of a new training module on research ethics and integrity	**RKE Plan** T1: Research Capacity & Capability T2: Research Quality T5: Doctoral Students T6: Postgraduate Research Experience
Build on the induction hub in line with the new values and strategic aims.	**P&C Strategy** T1: Developing a cultural roadmap. T2: Develop a distinct EVP. CC: Wellbeing, EDI, & Engagement
Develop hybrid working policy to support work/life balance, including digitalisation of processes.	**P&C Strategy** T1: Developing a cultural roadmap. CC: Wellbeing, EDI & Engagement
Policy reviews over 3 years to include key HR policies and consultation with relevant staffing groups and networks.	**P&C Strategy** T1: Developing a cultural roadmap. T2: Develop a distinct EVP.

5.3 Equality, Diversity and Wellbeing

Activity	*Link to institutional strategy/initiative/Theme (T)*
Launch of the new P&C Strategy	**P&C Strategy** T1: Developing a cultural roadmap. T2: Develop a distinct EVP. T3: Workforce planning. T4: Change management & innovation. CC: Wellbeing, EDI, & Engagement
HR focus on cross-cutting themes – wellbeing, EDI, and engagement to embed wellbeing into policies.	**P&C Strategy** T1: Developing a cultural roadmap. T2: Develop a distinct EVP. CC: Wellbeing, EDI, & Engagement
Review Wellbeing Action Plan to gain staff views/support the P&C strategy.	**P&C Strategy** T1: Developing a cultural roadmap. T2: Develop a distinct EVP. T3: Workforce planning. T4: Change management & innovation. CC: Wellbeing, EDI, & Engagement
Introduce Mental health first aiders & suicide awareness sessions.	**P&C Strategy** T1: Developing a cultural roadmap. CC: Wellbeing, EDI, & Engagement

5.4 Professional and Career Development

Activity	*Link to institutional strategy/initiative/Theme (T)*
Implement career development opportunities: mentoring, industrial knowledge exchange secondments, policy engagement training, PhD completions & ECR training.	**RKE Plan** T1: Research Capacity & Capability T2: Research Quality T3: Knowledge Exchange Relationships
New PPDR online module to digitise/aid reporting. Review will consider Jisc profiles & competencies to align skills with career development.	**P&C Strategy** T2: Develop a distinct EVP T3: Workforce planning