



University of
Lancashire

HR Excellence in Research Award: Summary Report

May 2026

Research and Knowledge Exchange Service
lancashire.ac.uk

Institutional context

The University of Lancashire gained university status in 1992, but our origins date back almost 200 years. Becoming the University of Lancashire in 2025 (previously University of Central Lancashire), marked an important new chapter in our story, reflecting our deep roots in the region, our proud heritage, and our ambitions for the future.

We are a multi-campus university with a 20,000+ student population, operating in Preston and Burnley (Lancashire), Westlakes (Cumbria), London and Cyprus.

We play an important role locally, helping develop the regional economic evidence base and priorities for regional economic strategies, such as the Local Growth Plan. We have partnerships with BAE Systems, AMRC NW, local authorities and Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to advance socioeconomic growth across multiple sectors.

Reflecting the applied nature of much of our research, knowledge exchange is a key strategic focus for the University and an area of significant strength. Our KEF results year on year illustrate excellence and breadth of knowledge exchange activity.

Research profile

The University is structured into 10 Schools, complemented by 13 interdisciplinary Research and Knowledge Exchange Institutes. We have a diverse research portfolio, returning submissions to 19 Units of Assessment (418 FTE) to REF2021 across all four Main Panel areas.

We comprise ~400 staff who have Significant Responsibility for Research, of whom around 90 are Research Only staff. We have ~50 technical staff, and an estimated 100 "research-enabling staff". Our Graduate Research School is home to 1,200 PGR students on average.

We are a global leader in patient-centred, applied health research, one of the UK's largest providers of nursing and allied healthcare professionals; and we are growing capacity in defense, cyber security and resilience.

As well as our role locally and in the North West, many of our researchers are world-leading experts whose work is transforming lives globally. Our research is contributing towards UN Sustainability Goals. Around one third of our work involves at least one major international NGO (e.g. UN, WHO, UNESCO). We were the first UK signatory to the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings (GCC), now the Trust Code.

We are committed to the development of our researchers and providing a nurturing research culture. We are signatories to the Researcher Development Concordat and Technician's Commitment and have held the HR Excellence in Research Award since 2011.

We recognise that staff will contribute to the University's research in diverse ways and fully understand the limitations of individual measures of the various measures of research. We have had a responsible metrics policy in place since 2019, are signatories to the San Francisco DORA. Most recently we have joined the Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment (2023) and are active participants in the UK Chapter of CoARA. We are members of the OR4 community which seeks to embed open research practices across the sector.

Financial context

The period since our last award cycle has been challenging for our institution and the sector at large. The University underwent a 2-year cost-containment exercise from 2023 to 2025. This has resulted in a reduction in research staff numbers, disproportionately affecting senior staff and those within the arts and humanities, and put pressure on research time and resources.

Research remains a priority for the University. Strategic initiatives continue to be developed to support research culture, centrally and through our RKE institutes, but our forward action plan has been developed pragmatically with financial constraints in mind.

Summary of progress and achievements of our last award

Substantial work has gone on across the institution related to employment, health and wellbeing, and EDI, including review and relaunch of our disability passport scheme, launch of our updated Belonging Strategy, establishment of EDI Leads across all Schools and Services, achievement of the Bronze Race Equality Charter Mark. All staff benefit from this work.

Focusing on researcher-specific achievements, there are a number of highlights.

- In January 2025, the University became a consortium partner for the British Academy Early Career Researcher Network North West and Wales cluster. We currently have 78 registered members, with 55 attendees at ECR events. The network provides financially supported access to events and training, peer-networking and resources.
- In 2025, we took part in the first North West Crucible programme¹, alongside four other north west HEIs. We funded three ECR places for three, intensive, day-long “labs” to explore career enhancement through interdisciplinary and cross-institutional research leadership and collaboration. Participants could apply for pump-priming of interdisciplinary projects, with two of our academics successful.
- A new Centre for Education Research was launched in 2023 to empower our academics to conduct high quality pedagogic research appropriate to their disciplinary or practice areas, working closely with our Centre for Collaborative Learning, which has a focus on best practice in teaching and learning. The Centre provides crucial support to early career researchers.
- In 2024, we launched our 10-day CPD campaign across Schools and Professional Services, including consultation, a suite of communications and guidance.
- In 2024/25, we participated in the REF2029 People, Culture and Environment pilot, a valuable opportunity to reflect on progress in this area and receive feedback.
- We developed our Research and Knowledge Exchange for All framework in consultation with the research community, to embed EDI across research activities. This was signed off by Academic Board in 2024.
- We held a week-long Research and Knowledge Exchange Festival in 2024, and two-day event in 2025. The events covered a range of sessions, many open to businesses and the general public. We ran a “3 minute-thesis” competition for our ECRs and MCRs had opportunity to present their

¹ Developed and run by the [White Rose University Consortium](#)

research. Developing the commercial awareness of our staff has emerged as a significant priority with a range of HEIF-supported activities, including a “Dragon’s Den” event in 2025.

- We ran our first RKE Awards in 2024/25, with 13 awards for research staff and students across a wide range of categories.

Researcher Development Concordat

Alignment with wider institutional frameworks

Research and researchers are at the heart of [our University Strategic Plan](#) (2021 to 2028), founded on six priorities, and in particular to *Priority 4: Real-world Research, Innovation and Enterprise*; and *Priority 3: Our People Experience*. This is complemented by our Belonging Strategy (refreshed in 2025), which sets out our whole University approach to strengthening our culture of fairness, inclusion, diversity and belonging.

Our new HEIF strategy for 2026 to 2029 sets out our priorities around knowledge exchange. Embedding commercial awareness and entrepreneurship amongst our student and staff populations is at the heart of this.

We are signatories to relevant concordats and initiatives that work hand in hand with our Concordat obligations. This includes concordats for Advancement of Knowledge Exchange in HE, Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice, Research Integrity and Openness on Animal Research in the UK.

Governance frameworks, policies, procedures and codes of conduct are in place to ensure research is conducted ethically and with integrity. Assurance for research is provided by the University Research, Knowledge Exchange and Ethics Committee (RKEEC).

Our Researcher Development Concordat commitment is closely integrated with REF-related activities, with our annual monitoring of REF preparedness across the University including research culture and environment. Our UoA Leads work with their research communities, in particular, supporting ECRs on securing funding and writing research outputs.

Governance and decision-making

Support for researcher development at the University draws on expertise from across the University, coordinated by the Research and Knowledge Exchange Service (RKES) and in collaboration with development colleagues within the People Team.

The Head of the Impact and Outputs Unit (RKES) has overall responsibility for this area and Concordat/HREiR reporting. Our Researcher Development Officer, supported by IOU administrative staff, works with teams across RKES and elsewhere to deliver a range of researcher development activities, including our Researcher Development Training Programme, newsletters, career stage forums, British Academy ECR Network, and monitoring of HR Excellence action plans.

Researcher Development is overseen by the Researcher Development Steering Group, chaired by the Director of RKES, meeting three times per year. The group comprises representatives from across career stages, and School representatives (Associate Dean for RKE, or equivalent).

Formal assurance reporting on researcher development is in place through the University Research, Knowledge Exchange and Ethics Committee (RKEEC), three times per year. In addition to receiving

regular updates, RKEEC approve our Researcher Development Concordat annual reports, submitted to the Concordat secretariat in 2023, 2024, and 2025. Schools and institutes report through RKEEC (twice and once per year, respectively) and are asked to highlight support for research staff at different career stages, including ECRs.

Stakeholder involvement

All research staff belong to a career stage forum run on Microsoft Teams – for ECRs, MCRs and Readers/professoriate. Regular informal events are held through which feedback on issues relevant to development can be provided. ECRs and MCRs meet annually with the PVC for Research and Enterprise.

A survey of ECR views on research culture was conducted by a member of the professoriate in 2024, with the findings presented to the Researcher Development Steering Group. All staff were invited to complete CEDARS in both 2023 and 2025, with subsequent quantitative and qualitative analysis of survey data.

Ahead of renewing our Award, stakeholder consultation was undertaken by RKES (winter 2025). Researchers were invited to vote on their top six priority obligations. Four focus groups were held to discuss issues within the three concordat areas.

REF2029 Code of Practice consultation was held in February/March 2026, contributing valuable intelligence on community concerns.

Professional Services teams that map closely onto particular obligations, such as EDI and Research Ethics were consulted in order to ensure any action planning was achievable and aligned with ongoing activities.

Draft obligations were discussed with the Research and Knowledge Exchange EDI Group; and Researcher Development Steering Group.

Forward direction

Internal evaluation and gap analysis

An internal evaluation and gap analysis of progress against each obligation and sub-obligation was conducted in 2026 based on the stakeholder engagement above, review of our backwards action plan, and emerging priorities.

High level findings:

1. Focus groups revealed a level of inconsistency in awareness of central support for research and how to get started, particularly from staff in newer Schools.
2. Staff feel that research is no longer an institutional priority and there was a strong desire for researchers and their achievements to have a more prominent profile.
3. Research only staff remain frustrated that progression pathways are not yet in place, although VCG in-principle approval for progression schemes was obtained in 2024.
4. As with national CEDARS findings, mid-career researchers feel less supported than other career groups.

5. Similarly, CEDARS analysis suggests that staff with protected characteristics have a less positive view about research culture and support, mirroring findings in institutional staff survey.
6. There is a growing need and desire across the University for strategy, policy and training around the use of artificial intelligence including its applications in research.
7. Staff departures have put substantial pressure on time available for research.
8. There has been reduced engagement in training and development, events, and consultations compared to previous years.

Strategic plan for the next three years (2026-2029)

Table 1 summarises our selected obligations for 2026-2029. We have focused our planning on added value activities for our research community, noting that many Concordat obligations apply to all staff and plans are already in place at an institutional level as part of our People and EDI strategies. Additional research-related activities are covered elsewhere on EDI charter mark action plans, as well as on our CoARA action plan and REF2029 Equality Impact Assessment. We will also continue to deliver a range of “business as usual” activities for our research community.

Our key priorities for the next three years are:

1. **Research culture and environment:** We will address inconsistency in experience of researchers in different parts of the University, supporting our newest Schools on their research journey and ensuring new researchers understand the range of support available. EDI will remain a key focus - ensuring REF2029 preparations are inclusive, that RKE4All is embedded across the University; and that progress is made on researcher-related actions identified on EDI-related charter marks.
2. **Employment:** Progression for research only staff remains a priority, although it is challenging to address in the current environment. We will investigate best practice in the sector and identify development opportunities for this group to improve their skills and employability. We will raise the profile of the diverse and impactful research being conducted across disciplines, providing better visibility and recognition for our researchers.
3. **Professional and career development:** Recognising the challenges for ECRs and MCRs in the current environment, we will explore opportunities for developing skills for this group. ECRs and MCRs will be empowered to shape the development of activities and resources that meet their needs. Recognising national policy drivers, we will seek to develop relevant skills around entrepreneurship and commercial awareness, and improve AI literacy for all.

Selected Concordat obligations

Obligation	Sub-obligation	Brief justification
Environment and Culture		
1.Awareness and engagement	1A - Ensure all relevant staff are aware of the Concordat and that institutional policies and practices related to researchers are inclusive, equitable, and transparent.	Lack of consistency in experiences of research culture. Staff with protected characteristics have a less positive experience.
4. Equality, diversity and inclusion	4A - Ensure managers undertake relevant training and development opportunities related to equality, diversity and inclusion, and put this into practice in their work.	RKE4All framework is not yet fully embedded. Opportunity to harness work underway to identify gaps and resource needs.
5. Research integrity	5A - Ensure researchers and their managers are aware of, and act in accordance with, the highest standards of research integrity and professional conduct. And that all members of staff use available mechanisms to report staff who fail to meet the expected standards of behaviour in relation to research misconduct.	Professoriate ranked this as a priority obligation. Rapidly emerging use of AI across the research lifecycle has important implications integrity. Funder requirement to manage this area.
Employment		
8. Recognition, reward and promotion	8A - Provide clear and transparent merit-based recognition, reward and promotion pathways that recognise the full range of researchers' contributions and the diversity of personal circumstances.	Research community feel that research and researchers are not sufficiently recognised institutionally. Raising the profile of our research community and recognising their contributions will be the focus of work under this obligation.
11. Job security	11A. Seek to improve job security for researchers, for example through more effective redeployment processes and greater use of open-ended contracts, and report on progress.	Financial constraints present a significant barrier, but this obligation remains a priority. We will seek to assess sector best practice and provide opportunities to develop the skills and experience of research only staff.
Professional & Career Development		
16. Diverse careers	16A. Recognise that moving between, and working across, employment sectors can bring benefits to research and researchers, and support opportunities for researchers to experience this.	Staff increasingly wish to seek careers outside of the sector. We will capitalise on our new HEIF strategy aim to create more commercially aware researchers.
16. Diverse careers	16B. Managers support researchers in exploring and preparing for a diversity of careers, for example, through the use of mentors and careers professionals, training, and secondments.	Athena Swan submission identifies need for targeted mentoring of female researchers. MCRs have a less positive experience. ECR/MCR leads to identify development needs.

