

HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) 10 Year Self-Assessment Review Report September 2024

Institutional Context

The University of Warwick is a leading research-intensive institution: globally connected, forward-looking and entrepreneurial, proud of its world-leading and impactful research and the dedication of its researchers. The [University's strategic goal](#) is to support a vibrant research environment that encourages innovation, cross-disciplinary collaborations, and partnerships, and that enables all researchers to thrive and produce excellent research.

The University employs over 2,000 research staff across its faculties, including early-career researchers such as postdoctoral fellows, to mid- and senior-level research staff, including research-only faculty and those engaged in both teaching and research. The target audience for Warwick's Researcher Development Concordat includes all research staff, with a particular focus on early-career researchers, as the key beneficiaries of activities, and as future ambassadors and leaders of research. The University includes postgraduate research students and technicians in its plans for a positive research culture and attends to the needs of research managers and leaders, and research enablers as part of the wider research environment, in recognition of their contribution to the career development and support of researchers.

Evaluation and Review Process

In 2024 an internal evaluation and consultation was conducted to guide the HREiR review process. The evaluation involved a mixed-methods approach, including:

- Twenty-two interviews with academic and professional services leaders, selected via their responsibilities in: delivering the previous HREiR submission, research leadership and strategy, leadership, talent and management, dignity and respect, research culture, and employee voice groups to gather feedback on institutional support, development opportunities, and perceived gaps.
- Four focus groups with early-career researchers, research managers, and senior academic leaders to discuss challenges and priorities for career development. Focus group participants were recruited by sending targeted communications to all members of research and teaching-active staff.
- Facilitated discussions with key stakeholders, or their representatives, who have strategic responsibility for the HREiR action plan.

The consultation exercise was also informed by feedback from members of staff who have facilitated leadership and management, research and leadership coaching and research culture events during the period 2021-2024. All conversations were semi-structured, designed to elicit a range of views of the lived experience of researchers, leaders and professional services experts.

Desk research was conducted with a range of datasets and resources, including CEDARS National Aggregate Results 2023; Consultation notes with University of Warwick senior leaders; Staff culture focus group report as part of the University of Warwick 2022 Culture Survey; University of Warwick 2022 Culture and Engagement survey; University of Warwick Staff Staff Survey 2023 (conducted by Best Companies), and outcomes from over seventy institutional research culture grass-root projects. In addition, all experts consulted in the previous submission of HREiR supplied an update of progress and a reflective narrative to capture their experience of delivering change projects in the intervening period.

The actions and priorities for this review submission have been shaped by:

- Institutional strategy and researcher-led projects that aim to foster a positive, inclusive and enabling research culture, initiated through the establishment of the National Centre for Research Culture (NCRC).
- A 'researcher impact map', developed in response to the themes that emerged from the evaluation process for this submission. The map identifies the full range of impacts that may be seen and felt by researchers and this has enabled us to develop consistent impact measures for the actions described in the plan.
- Reflection on the feedback received on our previous submission by the previous HREiR panel.

Governance Structures

Warwick places a strong emphasis on researcher engagement in decision-making processes. Through various committees and working groups, research staff have a voice in shaping institutional policies and practices. The University's efforts to enhance its research culture through the establishment of the [National Centre for Research Culture \(NCRC\)](#) are aligned with the principles of the Researcher Development Concordat, focusing on creating a supportive, inclusive, and productive environment where researchers can grow and succeed in their careers.

As part of a recent Academic Governance Review, the University is working to ensure that diverse voices are included in University Committees and that contributions are sought from across the community. The [University Research Committee](#) includes a representative from the [Research Staff Forum](#), with expressions of interest invited from all levels of researcher. The Research Committee also includes a PGR student representative and a technician representative.

The University has also established a [Research Culture Forum](#), which brings together researchers, technicians, PGR students, and Professional Services Staff to have open and collaborative discussions about the University's research culture, to share best practice and influence developments in this area. The Forum has established several working groups, to look at issues such as bullying and harassment, fixed term contracts, and training provision, which always include research staff members. In addition, this group has reviewed grass-root projects and allocated funding, through review panels which include ECRs and PGRs.

Overall responsibility for the action plan lies with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, who oversees the implementation and alignment of HREiR and Concordat activities with the broader university strategy. Institutional oversight for the HREiR and researcher careers is included in the Terms of Reference of the Research Committee, which receives regular updates on actions, related activities and progress made and which reports upward to the [University's Senate and Executive Board](#). The Research Culture Forum, which reports into Research Committee, has operational oversight for the action plan and related activities, monitoring of progress and impact of activities.

The HR Excellence in Research Action Plan is integrated with the University's other institutional priorities, including the [Research Culture](#) action plan and strategic roadmap, [Athena SWAN](#) and the [Race Equality Charter](#), signatory of [COARA](#) and [the Concordat to Support Research Integrity](#) and other legal and regulatory requirements. This ensures a cohesive approach to improving research culture, diversity, and career development support for all staff. Representatives from these areas form the membership of the Research Culture Forum and have been consulted on this submission.

Strategic Objectives and Implementation Plan

The strategic objectives that guide our approach are:

- To recognise the deep connection between a researcher's professional identity and their personal sense of self. This can shape their beliefs and behaviors about the kinds of careers they consider. It is essential to expand on existing initiatives that promote open and transparent conversations with researchers, developing their awareness of the full range of careers available to them.
- To recognise that there is a great deal of excellent support and development available to researchers at Warwick, (centrally and within academic departments) but that more work is needed to consolidate intelligence about this work, to improve access and disseminate good practice.
- To explore how our existing data sources may be more effectively utilised to both improve our understanding of the experiences of researchers and evaluate our activities.

Developing a positive research culture is one of the priorities of the University Research Strategy and the University is committed to creating an environment in which our researchers are happy, productive and creative. The University has allocated resource to drive forward research culture initiatives, make improvements that will benefit researchers and share best practice, not only at Warwick but nationally and internationally, through the establishment of the National Centre for Research Culture (NCRC). Our aim over the next three years is to continue the work already initiated, building upon the excellent foundations already built, and encourage greater involvement of our communities to ensure all diverse views are taken account of. This will be done through support for our academic departments, further engagement with our communities of practice, including our Research Culture Forum, our Research Staff Forum and our interdisciplinary ['Research Spotlights'](#); a new programme of funding and activity that aims to develop interdisciplinary research capability at Warwick. We will collate and curate examples of best practice to ensure wide reaching impact.

We aim to continue to empower researchers by supporting them to take forward initiatives to improve their environment, by disseminating examples of best practice and toolkits for wider adoption. We will ensure a co-ordinated approach to reach all Faculties and levels of researcher, as well as the wider research community. We are actively encouraging improvements in [open research](#) and [research integrity](#) and putting resource in place to support researchers with good research practice.

The NCRC aims to bring people together to share ideas and best practice and will build upon its highly successful implementation period over the last year, organising networks, events and pilot projects to drive forward work to improve research culture and environment. The NCRC will:

- Further build a community of researchers and practitioners to strengthen the visibility of research culture.
- Develop and implement sector-wide initiatives and share best practice to enable implementation of pilot projects across the sector.
- Create a national repository of materials and information about research culture initiatives.
- Facilitate empirical research and quality reviews into research culture.
- Raise the profile of research culture across the sector, providing advice and guidance to institutions with less dedicated research culture resource.

The NCRC will tackle some important issues, such as how to determine the effectiveness of research culture initiatives, the well-being of ECRs, career pathways for under-represented groups, and how to best support the career progression of our research support staff.

Past Progress and Achievements

As noted earlier in this report, we are particularly proud of our achievements and progress in research environment and culture. We have encouraged and supported researchers at Warwick to make a difference. We have achieved this by funding over seventy grass-root projects with Research England's Enhancing Research Culture Fund. We give researchers a voice through the Research Culture Forum and provide opportunities for them to connect through the Research Staff Forum, the interdisciplinary Spotlight programme and other communities of practice.

We value our researchers, and in particular our future research leaders and aspiring researchers and are working to improve their experience. In 2023-24, the Early-Career Researcher Wellbeing initiative was launched. This initiative aims to provide a supportive and nurturing environment for researchers in the early stages of their careers through interventions with both researchers and their managers. The programme aims to address the unique pressures faced by early-career researchers, promoting positive, healthy and informed approaches to career development.

The University has explored ways to reduce the impact of the precarity of fixed term contracts and has drawn up a proposal for improvements, with an implementation plan which includes establishing pools of research project managers, making better use of bridging funding, encouraging the development and recognition of transferable skills as well as recognising the value of non-academic careers, and ensuring more robust redeployment support.

We have seen good progress in areas relating to employment. We recognise a range of contributions in our academic promotion pathway and provide career advice and mentoring for our research staff. In addition, following our commitment to enact the recommendations of the TALENT Commission, we are amongst the first UK institutions to pilot a Technical Specialist Promotional Framework. We have also standardised the Personal Development Review (PDR) process at Warwick and initiated a communications plan to promote the University's commitment to ten days of dedicated researcher development time.

We have also made good progress in issues relating to researcher professional and career development. For example, we established the Research Operations Group (ROGs) in 2022-23. The group brings together all those involved in professional training and development across the University to share good practice and enhance collaboration. The Group has established [an online training directory of professional development opportunities](#), to improve access to all opportunities offered by the University.

In 2022-23, the University initiated a consultation with leaders and managers at all levels. The aim of the consultation was to create a guiding framework of role type, and associated skill clusters, that would inform the design and delivery of professional development for leaders and managers throughout the institution, including those with responsibilities for managing research-active staff. The new '[Leadership and Management Development \(LMD\) Framework](#)' informed the development of a new suite of development programmes, launched in 2023-24.

Targeted professional development programmes have been introduced, including [The Warwick PATHWAY Programme](#). We aim to create 'a career pipeline that does not leak', by developing a thriving community of black researchers across all faculties, presenting a clear vision of career pathways for black academics in higher education. The programme will address issues along the entire career pathway, from undergraduates to postdocs, to early career researchers and professors.

We have also invested in initiatives that recognise the full range of roles that contribute to a positive and enabling research environment. For example, we have established a national network for 'research enablers', including, research culture practitioners, researcher developers, and other research support roles. The National Researcher Enablers Network is an example of our outward-facing approach, that recognises that the HE sector has a shared and collective responsibility to address issues of environment and culture, people management, and researcher careers. The University aims to provide a focus and hub that both initiates, and disseminates, good practice in these priority areas. Furthermore, we have fostered an international conversation and research focus about research culture, through the annual International Research Culture Conference (IRCC).

Conclusion

The University of Warwick's commitment to enhancing the research environment since the previous HREiR review has resulted in substantial progress towards fostering a supportive and inclusive research culture. Our forward-looking action prioritises the development and wellbeing of its researchers, particularly early-career researchers, while addressing broader issues of research culture, career development, and inclusivity.

The establishment of the National Centre for Research Culture (NCRC), the launch of the Early-Career Researcher Wellbeing initiative, and the creation of national and international networks have demonstrated Warwick's national and international leadership in promoting best practice. The University's governance structures ensure that researchers have a voice in decision-making, and its strategic integration of the HREiR principles with wider institutional goals highlights a cohesive approach to improving the research experience for all.

Looking ahead, Warwick remains committed to building on its achievements, engaging its diverse research community, and supporting initiatives that enhance research culture and the researcher experience.