

HR Excellence in Research: De Montfort University Two-year Self-assessment

1. Introduction

De Montfort University (DMU) is committed to providing an inclusive, equitable and supportive working environment for all staff. There are less than a handful of staff at DMU on research-only contracts, and are mostly Research Assistants (largely without a doctorate). About half of all academic staff are in receipt of research time allocations (academics have to apply to secure research time allocation; contractually teaching-and-research contracts come with a 0.1 (160 hour) scholarship allocation and all research time over and above this has to be applied for through a Research and Innovation Allowance scheme). As such, we at DMU are using the definition of 'researcher' to include all staff with a research time allocation.

DMU secured the HR Excellence in Research Award in 2019 on the basis of an action plan to further improve the working environment for researchers. However, the feedback on that plan had indicated that DMU had not set out who it meant by 'researchers'. The institution has had significant changes in staffing and structures since that Action Plan was written, including the departure of the individual who had been leading on the Action Plan. As such, the new team is picking up afresh, and bringing a new approach to that Action Plan and the plan going forwards.

2. Institutional Context 2019-2021

Since the launch of the action plan to support researchers at DMU, there have been significant leadership changes across all aspects of the institution. This included the resignation of the then DMU Vice-Chancellor in early 2019. The last two years have also seen changes in research leadership, including the creation of a Researcher Development team, led by a Researcher Development Manager (January 2020), who now has responsibility for implementing the Concordat Action Plan and delivering on the university's commitment to the Concordat.

As a result of these institutional changes, working groups, such as the Concordat Operations Group and the Researcher Development Forum have not met. Rather, the actions and responsibilities of these two groups are now being absorbed into the existing governance structures of the institution.

3. Review Process

Due to the changed circumstances (as outlined above), oversight for monitoring and implementing the Concordat now rests with the University Research and Innovation Committee (URIC). URIC is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Enterprise, with membership including the Associate Deans for Research and Innovation from the four faculties (Arts, Design and Humanities; Business and Law; Computing, Engineering and Media; Health and Life Sciences), with additional research membership from research leaders and early career researchers across the four faculties.

The review process is managed by the Researcher Development Manager. Other major stakeholders such as People and Organisational Development (POD) are also involved in the review process.

Significantly, the career development and support for researchers is now also part of a major transformative programme shortly to be launched in the University (the Research Transformations programme), encompassing research capacity building, from postgraduate research students (PGRs) through to principal investigators (PIs).

4. Achievements and progress against the original action plan

4A: Recruitment and Selection (Principles 1)

- All new research-active staff receive a welcome email from the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Enterprise making them aware of the research induction – this has been developed to specifically outline the Research Strategy (2018-2023) and explain the Research and Innovation

Allowance (RIA) process. 61 researchers attended the 2019 induction and 20 researchers the 2020 induction.

- Recruitment and Selection training continues to run in both online and in-person settings. All hiring managers are able to easily book onto the training via DMUHub.
- There was a two-year RIA allocation round in 2018, with further rounds in 2019 and 2020 to capture new and existing staff requiring a RIA. In 2019, with a view to building research capability particularly amongst staff new to research or those returning to research, DMU launched a Researcher-in-training (RIT) allocation, with a year-long development programme to support candidates on the programme. Coined the Next Generation Programme, it comes with a small funding allowance and mentoring. The 2019-2020 cohort included 55 RITs. Due to COVID-19, cohort 1 was merged with cohort 2 (with 41 RITs allocated for 2020-21).

4B: Recognition and Value (Principles 2&3)

- The Researcher Development Team send out regular professional development bulletins to all researchers at DMU, raising awareness of professional development and networking opportunities available to them.
- We now offer training on managing research projects which are available to researchers at DMU applying for their first grant. We are developing an online resource that outlines PI responsibilities, covering also their obligations as potential managers of research staff.

4C: Support and Career Development (Principle 4&5)

- Mentoring activities have increased internally for staff over 2019-2021. The Next Generation Researcher Programme pairs the researcher with a mentor, who supports them with their career and research goals. The time of the mentor and mentee is also recognised in their workload.
- A Peer Review College has been set up in late 2020 to support strengthening of applications with feedback provided by senior, experienced members.
- A one-stop shop for all researcher development activity, whether for PGRs or staff, was created with the recruitment of a Researcher Development Manager and the formation of a Researcher Development Team in January 2020. This investment in dedicated resource has entailed a streamlining of provision, better coordination between POD, Library and Learning Services, academic faculties, and the Enterprise Directorate, and a significantly enhanced profile for research-related professional development opportunities.
- A workshop on ethics and integrity was rolled out for all researchers (including PGRs) in 2020 with high numbers attending (all online since COVID-19 ended face-to-face sessions); the postgraduate researcher session on 'Ethics Processes in the NHS' was broadened to include academic staff who need a refresher on these processes.
- DMU continues to be a signatory of the Concordat for Researcher Integrity and is due to update its current Guidelines for Good Research Practice.

4D: Diversity and Equality (Principle 6)

- The Faculty of Health and Life Sciences hosted their inaugural Athena Swan Conference, 'Dismantling Barriers, Building Pathways – What are the solutions for HLS?' Athena Swan applications continue to be developed for different schools across all Faculties.
- The Research Services Directorate is now more embedded into conversations about Diversity and Equality with the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research a member of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Discussions have begun to embed Concordat principles into a new DMU charter about our commitment to equality and diversity as the current charter, DMUFreedom, ends in January 2021.

4E: Implementation and Review (Principle 7)

- The implementation and review of the Concordat Action Plan is now part of the governance structure of DMU. It is part of the remit of the University Research and Innovation Committee, as

well as the Faculty Research and Innovation committees. The principles of the Concordat, particularly those around research culture and environment, will also be embedded in the Research Transformations programme being launched shortly to enhance the research capacity and profile of the institution.

- The newly formed Researcher Development Team led by the Researcher Development Manager coordinated this review with stakeholders, and drafted this report.
- Implementation of the action plan sat with multiple partners, including HR/POD, faculties and RSD.

5. Next steps and implementing action plan 2021-2023

The action plan for 2021-2023 aligns with the DMU Research Strategy 2018-2023. Our ambition is to increase the level of research and to have more than 60% of academic staff be actively researching. Our future actions have been decided based on discussions with researchers, academics, and professional services staff (including People and Organisational Development (POD) and RSD). Below are our goals for the next two years:

5A: Aligning research activity more closely to appraisal processes

- Key to rewarding and recognising research success will also be alignment of RIA objectives to the staff appraisal process (currently the two are not in sync).

5B: Increasing leadership, management and mentorship opportunities for researchers

- We are launching a Research and Teaching Scholarship scheme that will allow academic staff to apply for funds to recruit a research or teaching assistant. This allows the academic to gain valuable management and mentorship experience, whilst freeing up time for research and getting support for research activities.
- A programme is in development to support research leadership for new and returning-to-research academics.

5C: Improving mechanisms to monitor research culture and environment

- At the level of institutes and research groups, there is close monitoring of research activity and this will continue. Online platforms to capture research activity are currently being considered.
- Longer-term impacts of flagship research-focused programmes, like the Next Generation Researchers programme (for those who are new to research or returning to research after a long gap), and the Future Research Leaders programme, are now being monitored to identify support mechanisms that work well, and how these might be sustained and scaled up.
- At a wider level, the critical area for development is the effective use of time and resources to grow research careers, be it through PGR supervision, research grants, or impact and knowledge exchange, and to find ways to grow and sustain these.

5D: Expand our offering and develop a central asynchronous offering of training and support

- 2019-2021 saw an increase of provision for researchers and the launch of initiatives such as the Next Generation Researchers scheme to allow for structured and in-depth support for researchers across the institution. Our ambition is to expand this offering to support mid-to-late career researchers and develop a central asynchronous resource for researchers. This ambition will utilise Microsoft Teams, Sharepoint and Panopto as the main digital tools to support the development of this resource.

6. Measures of Success

The ultimate measure of success will be increase in research activity, which would be manifested in myriad ways including increasing research outputs, increased research collaborations, increase in grant income, impact activity, research-led teaching, and more research-active staff engaging in PGR supervision.