

HR Excellence in Research Summary report: University of Wolverhampton, 2025

Institutional context

The University of Wolverhampton has a proud heritage of excellence in research and knowledge exchange which has had a significant impact regionally and informs our teaching. Our research is curiosity-driven, collaborative and transformative. The University Strategy 2035 sets our ambition to develop high-quality, impactful research and knowledge exchange that transforms lives, and which makes a world-leading contribution in the areas of green innovation and sustainability, health and wellbeing and inclusive communities.

The primary audience for our HR Excellence in Research (HREinR) award is staff on research-only contracts (n=24) and staff holding teaching and research role profiles (n=345). However, we have an inclusive approach to research and our activities, initiatives, policies, and support are open to staff with an ambition to become research-active. Our approach to the HREinR award is to direct attention to the key needs of our research community, as identified through our internal evaluation, being focused yet ambitious in key areas of need.

Our submission in 2025 for the HREinR award reflects our heightened priority for research over the coming decade. In September 2023 we appointed a Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange. Following that we appointed a new Director of Research and Enterprise, and for the academic year 2024/25 launched an ambitious new Research and Enterprise Directorate. In May 2024 we launched our "Strategy 2035". The following overarching six goals of the [Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy](#), which was developed through engagement and consultation with our key stakeholders, provide the template to deliver our ambition for research and knowledge exchange:

- People, culture and community – develop a research and innovation environment and culture that fuels a high-performing RKE community.
- Excellence in research and innovation – strengthen a world-leading high-quality RKE that is challenge-led
- Infrastructure and platform for excellence – develop our state of art infrastructure and improve our systems and processes to help us realise our ambitions.
- Collaborations and Partnerships – develop new and enhance existing collaborations and partnerships and build our global reputation
- Transformational Impact – maximising impact and dissemination of our RKE
- Open and Inclusive – develop an open, inclusive and ethical approach

People, culture and community forms the vital first pillar of our RKE strategy, foregrounding the elements central to our HREinR award:

- Attract, reskill and retain talent: We will attract, develop and retain high-calibre research active staff and KE Practitioners.
- Recognise and reward RKE staff: We will celebrate our RKE strengths and achievements and create career paths, development opportunities, incentives and reward mechanisms to support a high-performing research community.

- Develop a growing and thriving community of research students: We will develop a diverse portfolio of Postgraduate Research degrees to address important scientific and societal issues, increase the number of research students and provide an enriching student experience.
- Innovation and entrepreneurship: We will actively encourage entrepreneurship, especially among Early Career Researchers and doctoral students, and provide dedicated support for turning research ideas into commercial opportunities.

Our HREinR award is also central to our new [People and Culture Strategy](#). Goal 4: developing, supporting and valuing our staff, states that we will ‘Develop our research community, using the HR Excellence in Research framework to focus our actions on supporting impactful research at Wolverhampton, ensuring our researchers are equipped to deliver upon our research priorities and to develop successful research careers.’

How we undertook an internal evaluation towards the HREinR award

We held the HREinR award from 2012 to 2021 and became signatories to the Researcher Development Concordat (RDC) in June 2020. In July 2021, we were unsuccessful in our reaccreditation to HREinR, in large part due to issues with reporting progress against an action plan from 2016 in the context of significant organisational change during that period. In the context of new Research and KE leadership and our Strategy 2035, we decided to invest in a programme of work to identify, understand, and reflect on the needs of our research community and create a clear plan of action around this towards seeking the HREinR award afresh in 2025.

A senior member of our university research community was identified to lead the work programme, reporting to the new University Research and Innovation Committee with oversight from our Programme for Improvement for Research and Innovation boardⁱ. In June 2024 a project delivery teamⁱⁱ was appointed, including recruitment of ECRs through an initial Expression of Interest form and panel review.

The approach of the project delivery team is rooted in understanding the needs of our research community in an evidence-based way, employing a structured methodology, developing recommendations for the university that directly speak to the needs of our research community, and focusing on ensuring we can monitor progress and measure impact. The project work has been delivered in three workstreams:

- Workstream One: Gap Analysis

The project delivery team conducted a detailed review of data collected over the past two years: internal records of consultations and meetings with our research community; HR documentation; faculty-specific reports; Doctoral College contributions, staff survey data; and independent evaluations. An extensive qualitative data analysis was conducted to identify the needs of the research community, current good practice, and gaps within institutional systems.

The methodology for this report encompassed qualitative data analysis, which included:

Document Analysis: Each document underwent structured review to assess core institutional functions, focusing on policy effectiveness, mentorship and development programmes, and research infrastructure and support.

Thematic Coding and Cross-Referencing: Qualitative coding was used to identify key themes such as policy impact, programme challenges, and resource distribution. Cross-referencing these themes across documents highlighted recurring issues like gaps in support for early-career staff and areas needing administrative improvement.

Triangulation: Findings were triangulated to enhance the validity of identified themes. Consistent needs for institutional support were observed across mentorship evaluations and policy reviews, reinforcing priority areas for development.

This integrated methodology provided a comprehensive understanding of institutional practices and requirements. This method not only clarified the institutional landscape but also yielded actionable insights to inform strategies for refining policies, enhancing programmes, and improving support mechanisms.

- Workstream Two: External Review

The project delivery team undertook an external review of good practice in researcher development and support across twelve selected HE institutions that currently hold the HREinR Award and who shared some similarities in terms of location, staff numbers etc with the University of Wolverhampton. The review considered specific themes such as: induction, training, professional development, research culture and networks, and researcher wellbeing. The information was collated and discussed in relation to processes and practices in our institution. We considered the types of evaluation methods deployed by those institutions to measure progress, as well as the ways in which those institutions conveyed and celebrated their research successes. We also initiated conversations with representatives from those institutions to learn more about these initiatives, their progress, and any challenges or barriers towards implementing and running them.

- Workstream Three: HR Mapping

Work was undertaken to review the University's current suite of Human Resources policies and procedures and to map those across to the award obligations to identify where there were gaps in the University's provision or where existing policies and practices need to be strengthened to ensure the University can fully meet its obligations under the award. The review considered the emerging findings from Workstream One, which helped to highlight the awareness, usage, and perceived effectiveness of these policies, helping to identify both enhancements to existing practices and the need for new policies to address any gaps. The University's HR policies and procedures cover the key elements of the employment lifecycle and alongside advice from the Human Resources Advisory teams and the provision of related learning and development activities aim to ensure that the University's managers are appropriately skilled and supported to manage staff effectively and in accordance with relevant employment legislation.

The delivery team met weekly to collaboratively establish principles, analyse institutional evidence, and discuss learning from other institutions. Together, they developed a gap analysis and drafted an action plan to reflect both the needs of our research community and the strategic goals of the institution. This structured and strategic approach ensures our efforts remain impact-driven, balancing ambition with workability while staying firmly rooted in evidence. By addressing both internal and external insights, the project lays a strong foundation for the future.

Following the core project work outlined above, three workshops were held on campus with the wider research community at the university. Sessions were introduced by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange, and following this the project delivery team provided an overview of the award, why the award is important for our research community, and what it means to achieve it. The ECRs shared details of our project work, findings, and action plan. The key content of the sessions were discussion groups focusing on two key proposals made to the university through the project: developing a Research Culture Network; and a full review of researcher development training. Discussion groups had 20 minutes to focus on each topic, with all attendees participating in a discussion about both topics, facilitated by an ECR. There followed a brief feedback session and summary of the next steps for the HREinR award process and how the key themes from the discussion sessions would be taken forward. There were 15 attendees from across the faculties and directorates: four from the Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing, five from the Faculty of Arts Business and Social Sciences, four from the Faculty of Science and Engineering, one attendee from the Research and Enterprise Directorate and one attendee from Registry. 12 attendees were on teaching and learning contracts, two were research support, and one from registry.

The workshop discussions were captured live on flipchart paper and written notes were also recorded by a member of the project delivery team as note-taker in each group. Following this, all notes were uploaded to the shared team space and thematic summaries produced. Attendees shared their own experiences of good practice and challenges within the institution, experiences at other institutions, and high-level and practical suggestions. Attendees supported the proposals, highlighted the importance of building on existing good practice, consistency across the institution, and called for greater recognition and celebration of research. Staff were particularly committed to ensuring an inclusive approach, which aligns with the ethos of our institution. These summaries have informed the HREinR action plan and the details have, importantly, been fed forward into delivery and implementation plans for the Research Culture Network and review of researcher development training. Attendees had the opportunity to review the final draft action plan and feedback was implemented by the project team ahead of submission to Vitae. Having identified the needs of the research community in the first stage of our project work, this second stage has ensured that we are involving the whole research community in designing responses to those needs.

Our strategic objectives, governance structures, and implementation plan

Our HREinR action plan forms a central tenet of two of our Strategy 2035 strategies: Research and Knowledge Exchange, and People and Culture. HREinR will form a standing item on the People and Culture Committee (which reports directly to the university board). Operationally, our HREinR action plan will form the central agenda setting for our new Committee for Researcher Development and Doctoral Studies (CRDDS). The Terms of Reference for CRDDS include two overarching objectives, the first related to research students, and the second objective 'to develop the strategy for and oversee researcher development, and to oversee the University's commitments under the HR Excellence in Research award and the Concordat to Support the Development of Research Staff. CRDDS will be chaired by a new institutional lead for research culture and reports to our University Research and Innovation Committee.

Our approach has been grounded in understanding the needs of our research community in an evidenced based way. In seeking the HREinR award we are responding to the voice and needs of our research community, being ambitious in key areas of need, while not over committing at the expense of ensuring our core activity is fit for purpose. We have strategically balanced our proposals between: 1. what we do well, that might require some minor revisions to evidence impact; 2. where we already have new plans and structures agreed/in place, and need to roll out and measure impact; 3. what we need to do that is new.

Following the project work outlined above, in November 2024 a number of core recommendations were presented to the oversight group. This included a recommendation that we report on research-only staff and staff on teaching and research contracts as our core direct beneficiaries of the action plan. The oversight group noted that longer term we will focus on the wider community and ensure they are included in what is offered as we roll out new plans. Recommendations concerning survey data were that: 1. we participate in CEDARS 2025. While we need a broad range of evidence, CEDARS data will be a helpful summary of progress in key areas.; 2. That staff survey data should be broken down by detailed staff groups (e.g. research only, teaching and research).

More substantially, the project team recommended a review and redesign of staff development and training across the institution. In order that this be overseen at the highest levels, the oversight group decided this should be led through the People and Culture strategy. This work will be undertaken by a team consisting of researchers, organisational development (HR) and the Research and Enterprise Directorate. The second substantial recommendation was to develop an ambitious research culture network across the institution. This will provide a holistic way to address key themes from the gap analysis including a need for improved ECR networks, mentoring, development and support, building on pockets of good practice. To realise this ambition, a new Research Culture Manager will be appointed within the new Research and Enterprise Directorate and an Institutional Lead for Research Culture appointed from within the University.

New policies on progression for research only staff and retention of research staff on fixed term contracts were recommended. Following approval from the oversight group, the Director of HR was consulted regarding implementation. The final recommendation was that, while we focus on the above recommendations that directly address our gap analysis, we do not propose actions around diverse careers in this HREinR action plan at this time.

The new Research and Enterprise Directorate is central to our implementation plan. The Directorate complements the University's new strategic vision and this single and coherent professional service directorate will deliver sector leading provision to our internal and external stakeholders. The Research & Enterprise Directorate will provide an enabling operating model through our highly skilled and professional teams. The consolidation and integration of Research and Enterprise services in a single directorate will enhance communication and collaboration between service providers; a single service throughout the whole research and enterprise life cycle and the embodiment of the "one stop shop" for our research and enterprise community with consolidated leadership across research and enterprise, which underpins accountability.

The recommendations from the project delivery team respond directly to the identified needs of our research community. The action plan around these is firmly positioned within university strategy, has been reviewed by the research community, University Research and Innovation Committee, and Offices of the Vice Chancellor, and implementation has been carefully considered, with responsibility and reporting lines clearly and formally articulated.

ⁱ **Oversight group:** Prof Prashant Pillai (Pro-Vice Chancellor for RKE; Ceri Jones, Director of Research and Enterprise; Dr Opinderjit Takhar, Associate Dean RKE Faculty of Education Health and Wellbeing; Prof Vijay Reddy, Associate Dean RKE Faculty of Arts Business and Social Sciences; Prof Tracy Warr, Associate Dean RKE Faculty of Science and Engineering; Rachel Adams, Chief People and Culture Officer.

ⁱⁱ **Delivery team:** Project lead, Prof Laura Caulfield, Chair of the Institute for Community Research and Development; Lindsay Fleetwood, HR Strategic Project Officer; Sophie Cole, Administrator; Dr Kiranpreet Kaur (Faculty of Education Health and Wellbeing, Research Associate - fixed-term contract); Dr Nazanin Khasteganan (Faculty of Education Health and Wellbeing, Senior Lecturer); Dr Kerry Hadley-Price (Faculty of Arts Business and Social Sciences, Lecturer); Dr Joshua Blamire (Faculty of Arts Business and Social Sciences /Institute for Community Research and Development, Research Fellow).