REF2021

Institution: Edge Hill University

1. Context and mission

Founded in 1885, Edge Hill University (EHU) was England's first non-denominational teacher training college for women outside London. Now with over 15,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students, and over 1500 staff, including approximately 600 academics, we have three faculties: Arts and Sciences (FAS), Education (FoE), and Health, Social Care and Medicine (FHSCM). Unaligned to any mission group, we achieved university status in 2006 and research degree awarding powers in 2008. While we have participated in the RAE/REF since 1996, our research environment has undergone very significant improvement since 2008. In REF2014 we returned 138.5 FTE (27.2%) achieving 2.22 GPA, compared to 65.01 FTE (14%) in 2008, 1.5 GPA. In REF2021 we submit 259.2 FTE (47.5%).

Our mission it to provide an intellectually stimulating, creative and inclusive environment for our community through teaching and learning of the highest standard, supported by pure and applied research of international significance, giving a firm foundation for our graduates and other stakeholders in a rapidly changing world. Our roots are in widening access, providing opportunities in education and social advancement for those who would otherwise be denied. This is a history of which we are proud, and the principles of fairness, accessibility and inclusion continue to underpin our mission. We are a modern university that regards the integration of research, advanced scholarship and professional practice with life-long learning opportunities as integral to securing the future of individuals and societies.

Situated in Ormskirk, West Lancashire, our immediate environment is rural, with the major cities of Liverpool and Manchester and other urban areas such as Wigan and Preston close by. There are also local areas of significant deprivation, such as Kirkby and Skelmersdale. We are also close to important natural environments, such as the Sefton coast (a site of special scientific interest) and open grasslands of the Pennines. These immediate environments influence our research projects and our partnerships: for example, tackling questions of inequalities relating to health, well-being and educational attainment, and the challenges of sustainability.

A significant element of our teaching portfolio is focused on public service: alongside nurses, midwives, paramedics and teachers, we now train doctors and police officers. These areas of practice inform our research in terms of the questions we ask, the collaborators we work with and how we support and develop our people.

2. Strategy

EHU's ambition is that our research expertise makes a difference to our local communities and partners, whilst also making significant contributions to global debates and challenges. We want our research to be accessible to all and we marry our teaching and research agendas wherever possible to expose our students (often from low university participation neighbourhoods) to the benefits and excitement of the research process: we believe this not only provides researchers with a stimulating environment, but it also enhances the student experience.

Strategic goals 2014-2020

1. To produce world-class research outputs which achieve impact outside of the academy

   - Growing the reach and impact of our research, alongside its quality and scale has been a key aim during this REF period. We have significantly increased the volume of outputs in peer reviewed journals, produced books with publishers recognised for their quality and created practice-as-research (PaR) outputs in established and innovative arenas. Enhancing our ability to contribute knowledge and expertise to benefit research users and partners has been central to research planning (see Research Institutes and Centres below). Internal funding support requires impact plans to be embedded in bids (alongside commitment to research integrity, open research and data management plans).

2. To attract, retain, nurture and develop academic staff, supporting and enhancing their research aspirations

   - We believe that people are the lifeblood of the organisation and investment here is key for both sustainability and vitality of research. We focus on research mentorship and provide significant support for ECRs through internal research-support funds and a comprehensive development programme which complements departmental provision. We have invested in research leaders and actively supported staff to progress through the grades to ensure sustainability: see section 3.

3. To attract more postgraduate research students and manage their timely and successful completion

   - In REF2014, we had 15 PhD awards: we invested in our Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) programme to develop our PGR community and report 124 awards for REF2021 (plus an additional four PhDs-by-publication). As our research networks and partnerships grow, we are securing external funding to support PGRs and departments are rewarded when they secure external funding with an additional EHU-funded studentship.

4. To provide the highest-quality facilities, resources and environment in which research may flourish (see section 4)

5. To increase research income and overhead recovery

   - In REF2014 we recognised that securing research income was an area for development to ensure sustainability and to invest more in research infrastructure. In this REF cycle we have increased our external research income from by 156% to £5,476,010; including approximately £1m in contributions to overheads (see also section 4).

6. To form strategic partnerships to enhance our research culture and promote impact

   - Strategic partnerships, particularly those that help to align teaching, research and knowledge exchange, have grown considerably, as evidenced in REF5b narratives. Our long tradition of practice-related research has provided foundations to grow partnerships with schools, other educational settings, hospitals, hospices, charities and local community groups to develop research that has the beneficiaries at its core. Encouraging researchers to consider the needs of users is promoted by the strategic use of research support funds. For example, we have built key partnerships with government bodies (Sport England, Natural England) and national cultural bodies (Tate). These partnerships have been central to securing research funds, including UKRI funds.

7. Provide the right research environment through investment in facilities and infrastructure

   - We are committed to open research and encourage the deposit of outputs and data wherever possible through our research and data repositories. Without OA transition funds, we use QR to support OA costs and are actively engaged with securing 'read-and-publish' deals with publishers that facilitate 'gold' OA.

   - We post annual reports on the Concordat for Research Integrity and promote good governance and personal research integrity through staff development and induction

   - In addition, we have invested in physical and non-physical infrastructure to support high-quality research (section 4).

<u>Research institutes and centres</u>

Capitalising on our research and impact strengths, we invested in our three research institutes (RI) now complemented by seven research centres promoting interdisciplinarity and partnerships; these have been key to realising our strategic goals, bringing together staff and PGR students and underpinning work with key partners, thereby driving research and impact. Each RI has an annual £25k research-support budget to cover directly-incurred costs for

projects, which complements other central support funding. The Institute for Creative Enterprise (ICE) focuses broadly on the creative industries – along with its work with Everton in the Community (EitC) and the Tate, it has also been central to raising artist Leonora Carrington's profile (see UOA34); the Institute for Social Responsibility (ISR) critically examines broad conceptualisations of social responsibility across the social sciences, arts and humanities – it has been central to the securing of two AHRC awards working with community organisations (UOA34); the Health Research Institute (HRI) drives collaborative research, evaluation, clinical education and care delivery: partners and funders include Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust and the NIHR (see UOA3).

A vibrant intellectual environment is reflected in the annual Festival of Ideas co-organised by the RIs which bring thousands of people on to campus to listen to thinkers and practitioners debating the challenges of the day. Events here have supported collaborations, including award winning work with EitC and Tate Liverpool which brings together researchers, students and collaborators to address poor mental health in a deprived neighbourhood (UOA24); other examples are highlighted in REF5b narratives.

Partnership work and bringing research users to the heart of the research process underpin our research centres. New centres, such as the Centre for Child Protection and Safeguarding in Sport (CPSS), the Respiratory Research Centre, the Centre for Human Animal Studies (CfHAS) and the International Centre on Racism (ICR), build on growing areas of expertise. The interdisciplinary institutes and centres have taken on the aim of building broad, rich and sustainable partnerships at all levels, thinking globally and acting locally to address major challenges. Recent examples of impact from their work include: rethinking relationships with animals as food (CfHAS with the Vegan society); prevention of child sexual abuse in sport (CPSS with the NWG network and Sport England); enhancing public understanding and policy debates on anti-Semitism and Islamophobia (ICR with European University Institute).

Research Strategy 2021-2026

For the next five years, capacity building will continue with four key strategic objectives (below). Our primary commitment is to expand the production of high-quality research that addresses the challenges we face, while staying true to our long-held beliefs of promoting inclusion and engaging with marginalised groups. To do this we will:

1. Invest in people:

    a. Recruitment of people who are committed to generating exciting, relevant research which informs their teaching.

    b. Support staff, including post-doctoral researchers, to develop their research aspirations and careers.

    c. Invest in research leadership through targeted training and development

    d. Continued investment in the next generation of researchers with support for PGR students, balancing the GTA scheme with an increase in externally-funded studentships.

    e. Continue to integrate students into staff research programmes to help raise their aspirations and ambitions, and to invest in the next generation of researchers.

    f. Regularly reviewing our strategies, policies and support mechanisms to ensure that they benefit all academics and researchers equally.

2. Ensure the sustainability of our research by securing external funds and investing internal funds strategically, through:

    a. Preparedness for calls from UKRI and other funders by aligning our research to priority areas.

    b. Investing our QR strategically in:

      i. Pump-priming research to enable researchers to develop strong programmes of research, attracting further funds (see section 4)

      ii. Supporting ECRs to consolidate their research profile, including priority access to internal research funds.

      iii. Supporting colleagues returning from extended periods of leave including parental/adoption leave, sickness or secondments through priority access to internal funds – this will be extended to support people whose research has been particularly affected by COVID-19.

3. Optimise the relatively small size of Edge Hill to facilitate cross-disciplinary working and engage partners locally, nationally and internationally to address the Government's IRIS themes and priorities identified in the UKRI Roadmap by:

    a. Supporting research excellence wherever it is found within the University, complementing discipline-based research with encouraging the formation of cross-disciplinary research centres to develop research projects which work on a large scale, to ensure their sustainability and capacity for making an impact.

    b. Establishing a Data Science STEM institute which builds on existing research in AI and autonomous vehicles, as well as work in Biology and Geosciences to examine clean growth from a multidisciplinary perspective.

    c. Broadening our range of partnerships to co-produce and/or develop research with users and beneficiaries including regional businesses, the general public, professional practitioners (including those in the creative industries), and policy makers.

    d. Expanding our disciplinary base – we established a Medical School in 2019 and an Engineering Department is currently being created; research in these areas will enhance how we engage with key challenges and priorities such as healthy ageing.

4. Invest in the research environment:

    a. Invest in research infrastructure, maximising synergies with teaching needs, and make facilities open to partners wherever possible to enhance networking.

    b. Promote the University as a space for intellectual exchange by hosting and developing events that encourage debate and engagement, including our established annual Festival of Ideas.

    c. Growing open research with access both to research data and outputs, and enhance the visibility of our research through optimising Pure and Figshare. We will use QR-funds strategically to support OA, particularly where findings are of interest to countries on the ODA list. We are exploring options for OA books and chapters, particularly for humanities and social science researchers, building on the steps we have already taken in making chapters OA.

    d. Maintain rigorous governance infrastructure that is fit-for-purpose and able to respond to the changing needs of our researchers as we move into new areas of research.

3. People

Success can only be achieved with the full engagement and commitment of staff and students; EHU strives to create an outstanding environment, underpinned by our ethos of inclusivity with transparency, consistency and fairness, to enable our community to perform to the highest standards and ultimately support the long-term sustainability and success of the University.

EHU'S People Plan (PP) (2020-25) is underpinned by two themes: well-being for all, and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

Staffing strategy and staff development

Our core aim is to recruit and retain excellent staff and to support them to realise their own ambitions and those of EHU.

Recruit:

- Our selection process is based on merit, thorough appropriate assessment against the agreed criteria for successful delivery of the role. All panel members must attend in-house training on recruitment, selection, and EDI.

- We appoint at all career stages and employ our academic staff on the same teaching and research contracts in recognition of the variety of responsibilities our academic staff undertake.

- We strive to be an equal opportunities employer; this includes producing annual equality impact assessments (EqIAs) of our recruitment and selection processes and regular benchmarking against national standards

  - As identified in our Athena Swan and HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiRA) action plans, we have reviewed the language used in our job adverts and descriptions, and increased the reach of our job opportunities to attract a more diverse pool of applicants.

Retain:

- Part-time and fixed-term staff: all staff have equal access to training and development opportunities and to the internal research support funds and bid support resources (see section 4)

- PDRAs: Our small community of post-doctoral researchers on fixed-term contracts have access to the same resources as academic staff. As numbers increase, this will be reviewed to ensure that we meet our Concordat responsibilities.

- Flexible working: staff may apply for a change in their terms and conditions to facilitate flexible working if the changes relate to hours, times, or the location they are required to work. Departments also facilitate informal flexible arrangements to manage short-term changes to working patterns.

- Promotion: our Athena Swan action plan led to the review of promotion processes to improve consistency and transparency. Promotion to grade 11 and above now reflects one of three pathways: learning and teaching, research, or external engagement. Promotion opportunities occur annually and all academic staff are eligible to apply. The process is based on merit, through appropriate assessment against the agreed criteria. Staff are supported to achieve promotion through agreed development plans.

- Wellbeing: HR provides a range of benefits to complement statutory obligations, these include:

  - Phased return to work

  - Wellbeing sessions and campaigns to promote physical and mental health

  - Mental health support resources, including the counselling service and 'big white wall'

  - Staff benefits – including annual 'flu jabs and financial planning support

  - Support networks – e.g. LGBTQ+, carers group.

Develop:

- Induction: support begins with a comprehensive induction programme to promote knowledge and understanding of staff rights and obligations, as well as familiarity with

the key codes of practice which frame their practice (including the CoP for Research Conduct and the code of conduct for PGR supervisors)

- Probation and performance and development review (PDR): all new staff, regardless of seniority and contract-type, undergo a year-long probation. When complete, they move to annual PDR with six-monthly progress review. Here research and development goals are identified, and managers and staff-members discuss how these will be realised and what support is needed.

- Staff development: we provide a range of mandatory and optional development opportunities run by HR, the Research Office, Centre for Learning and Teaching, and Learning Services. HR focuses on core mandatory staff training (including 'Diversity in the workplace' and, for senior managers, 'Unconscious bias workshop'), people management, and mentoring and coaching. The RO coordinates the Researcher Development Programme which is benchmarked against Vitae's Researcher Development Framework: this is open to PDRAs, PGR students and associate tutors.

- Study/exam leave: all staff are granted 1.5 days paid leave per exam for revision and attendance or if their programme of assessment is coursework based

- Time to train: staff can request time to undertake any training which they believe will improve their professional effectiveness and the performance of the University. There is no limit on the amount of time for study/training that can be requested and, though there is no right to be paid for the time spent training, flexible working and workload allocations can be used to accommodate this (agreed in PDR).

    o Staff who are studying for a PhD and transitioning to research independence are allocated enhanced staff development to provide time to engage.

    o We established a PhD by Publication route for staff with suitable research publications; we awarded our first in 2016.

    o EHU provides time and funding for staff to engage in external development activities e.g. Advance HE's Aurora programme.

    o These allocations are part of the minimum of ten days staff development (pro rata for part-time staff) reflecting our commitment to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

Support for early career researchers:

Supporting ECRs is key to ensure vitality and sustainability: in REF2014, 25% of our submission was made up of ECRs – we have supported their development with priority access to internal research funds and mentoring. Of the 20 submitted in 2014 who are submitted again here, eight are now readers/professors. Some ECRs may be established staff members who have gained their PhD while in post, possibly after many years in practice. UOAs have processes to support these post-doctoral staff to transition to independent researchers. We encourage pre-doctoral practice-based staff to become involved in research projects as 'novice' researchers where their expertise can enhance the research: this may be the beginning of a research career. Our biennial ECR conference and poster competition, with prizes of professional development funds, is open to post-doctoral ECRs, PGRs and 'novice' researchers to support networking, presentation skills and interdisciplinary working.

PGR students

We have invested QR in our GTA programme because we believe that a thriving PGR community is key to a healthy research environment. The growth of PhD completions (727%) reflects our commitment to supporting the development of the next generation of researchers. The GTA programme is central to this growth: starting with an annual recruitment to one faculty of twelve students, it has expanded to 30-36 appointments per year. Our ethos is that PGR students are apprentice researchers rather than students (without diminishing their rights and privileges as students). They have access to the same training and development opportunities

as staff members. Our GTAs have a strong record of moving onto appointments as lecturers, post-docs and industry professionals.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

We established our EDI Steering Group (EDISG) in 2019, chaired by Dean of FOE with senior staff from across the University. This is supported by an EDI Operations Group (EDIOG) that delivers on strategy and informs the review and renewal of our policies: both the EDISG and the EDIOG have members from all areas of the University and work holistically to include student and staff-facing activities. The HR EDI lead promotes coherence in, and rigorous monitoring of, our approach to EDI.

Compliance with sector EDI standards is reflected in the following:

- Athena SWAN institutional bronze award (renewed in 2019)

- HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiRA) (renewal submission February 2021).

- Times Higher Education Leadership and Management Awards, highly commended workplace of the year (2017)

- Disability Confident employer

- Mindful employer status

- Partnership with Working Families

- Stonewall Champion and recognition of our commitment to LGBTQ+ rights

- Equal pay audits

- We provide 10 funded places per year on Advanced HE's Aurora programme.

Over the course of the next REF census period, we:

- Aim to achieve the Race Equality Charter and support more departments to achieve their own Athena Swan awards, including our first silver award.

- Expand the use of EqIA on key processes beyond REF preparations, including outcomes of internal research funding applications, and take appropriate action based on the outcomes. The EqIAs and action plans will be reported annually to the University Research Committee.

- Annual analysis of promotion and progression processes to ensure that any unevenness is identified and addressed.

4. Income, infrastructure and facilities

The University recognises that strategic investment in infrastructure and facilities is essential to ensure the vitality and sustainability of research and the generation of impact. We do this through: bid development support; support for partnership development and outreach; investment in buildings and equipment; and development of research culture.

Bid development

Growing external income is essential for the health of research, particularly in resource-heavy disciplines. It also helps support the growth of PGRs and post-docs. In the current REF cycle, income has increased by 156%: this has come from a range of sources including UKRI research councils, NIHR, European Commission, charities, commercial partners and others. An increasing proportion of these funds come from funders who provide a higher proportion of fEC, vital for long-term sustainability. Particular successes include a major BBSRC award to investigate novel antibiotics (UOA4); our first two Leverhulme fellowships (UOA 20 & 28); Innovate UK Biomedical Research Catalyst funding (UOA 3) and Horizon 2020 awards

(UOA11), our first ever projects funded by a European research and innovation framework programme. Recently grants have been secured from the AHRC (UOA 27 & 34); Leverhulme (UOA27) and Erasmus+ (UOA18 and UOA20). We have achieved this by:

- Investment in the Research Office to help support academics to make successful bids and to maximise their impact: this is evidenced by the increase in bids submitted from 44 with a value of £2.2m in 2013/14 to 163 in 2019/20, with a value of £12.6m – five bids were successful in 2013/14 (£80k) and 38 in 2019/20 (£773k). This reflects a total award value for the REF2021 period of £12.9m (£5.9m for EHU).

- Providing dedicated research contracts and research post-award finance support.

- Research institutes have established bid-development initiatives and mentoring schemes for staff at different career stages.

- Research support funds: to support the appointment of research assistants; teaching buy-out; research consumables, fieldtrips, conference attendance etc. Funding decisions are made by a peer reviewer panel with representatives from all faculties and expertise in the main disciplines of arts and humanities, social sciences, and sciences, with the following award types:

  o Research Investment Fund: RIF supports staff to pump prime external bids and has a strand that prioritises ECRs and staff returning from extended leave, including parental leave

  o Research Institute Thematic Awards (RITAs) (2015-2019) explicitly supported interdisciplinary research (this is now managed directly by our RIs)

  o Conference support: we understand the importance of conference attendance (normally one per year) to academics in disseminating research and gaining feedback of research under development. Central funds will support up to 50% of conference costs and, to be highly responsive, we review applications monthly.

  o External funding rewards – when successful in securing external research grants, researchers may claim an award (a percentage of the award value) to use on research-related activity.

  o PGR Bursary: PGR students have access to ring-fenced funds to support their studies and conference attendance, in addition to departmental funds.

Support for partnership development and outreach

Networking and partnership development are key to ensuring the researchers consider the needs of research users and we believe that research can be enhanced by collaborative working alongside users of research throughout the research process, as well as through co-production. All UOAs have established networks to identify research challenges and priorities.

- Each faculty has its own business-development team that supports work with research users and help to develop partnerships: notably the Productivity and Innovation Centre has generated over 120 relationships with SMEs, some of which will become research partnerships.

- The RO has a Research Impact Manager who provides support for the planning, development and delivery of research impact, and training and development of researchers.

- Internal funds support partnership building, alongside the RITAs identified above:

  o Impact and Knowledge Exchange Fund (IKEF): this fund aligns with our strategic aims to increase collaboration and external engagement, enhance knowledge exchange and place impact at the heart of our research planning and development.

  o Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF): to support and promote engagement with ODA compliant research; the University remains committed to continuing this

with its own QR funds in the light of recent government decision to suspend this allocation.

- The RIs are central to supporting partnership development and incorporate external partners, including end-users and professional practitioners, on their governance structures and decision-making bodies.

<u>Investment in buildings and facilities</u>

We believe that investment in physical research support is central to attracting the best researchers and PGRs and to allow researchers to expand their research. Some of these facilities support cross-disciplinary working.

- Investment in the built environment includes: the Catalyst, the £26m learning resource centre, was opened in 2019 which has the Loft, a dedicated workspace, for researchers (staff and PGRs) to use for quiet study; the £13m (including £3m grant from the Lancashire LEP) Tech Hub, with its 4k computer assisted virtual environment (CAVE), opened in 2016 and is used for teaching, knowledge exchange and research; the Medical School has a multi-professional clinical learning centre; new state-of-art Biology laboratories to facilitate a range of research and a purposely refurbished building for Psychology, which includes research labs.

- Equipment: investment in equipment has also included for world-class laboratories in Computer Science and Sport and Physical Activity, and for HTA activity.

We also recognise the importance of other research support infrastructure, in particular to ensure that our research is carried out safely and ethically, reflecting the highest standards of integrity:

- A comprehensive research-governance structure - we reviewed and enhanced our governance infrastructure which led to investment in an online ethics monitor (Haplo) to make project registration and ethical review process more efficient and transparent. This was underpinned by establishing five subject research ethics committees whose members are trained using resources informed by UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO).

- Acquiring the Human Tissue Authority (HTA) licence in 2015 (and suitable storage facilities): overseen by the HTA Management Group to ensure best practice and monitor compliance. This has helped broaden our research base, particularly in Sports Science and Psychology.

- The University is a signatory of DORA and committed to the Leiden manifesto leading to a statement on the use of metrics to guide staff and managers. We are mindful of the benefits and limitations of research indicators which come with the increase in data on research performance. We do not use metrics and indicators to judge individual research performance (for recruitment, progression, or promotion), or access to resources.

- Investment in systems/software: acquisitions since 2014 include Pure, Figshare and Haplo and subscriptions to ORCiD and DMPonline – these help academics to track applications and manage research projects etc., as well as helping managers to ensure that rigorous processes of review are being carried out.

We have put in place the infrastructure and governance arrangements which will enable EHU enhance very significantly its research stature over the coming decade.