

## HR Excellence in Research Award: Eleven-Year External Review Report, 2025

### Institutional context and research governance

London South Bank University (LSBU) is a diverse and enterprising university, part of the LSBU Group that shares a common mission to challenge social and economic inequalities, and a vision to transform lives and address real world challenges. LSBU comprises three Academic Colleges with an academic staff base of: 245 teaching & research staff, 34 research-only staff, 336 teaching staff. Research Governance is led by the PVC Research & Innovation (PVC R&I) who chairs the University Research & Innovation Committee (URIC), and reports to Academic Board. Reporting to URIC are: REF Strategy Group (including the Inclusive Researcher & REF EDI Advisory Group); College R&I committees (led by an Associate Dean R&I, ADRI); the ECR Group; the Researcher Development Group (RDG); the University Research Ethics & Integrity Committee; and the Research Degrees Board.

### LSBU's Commitment to the Researcher Development Concordat

LSBU is committed to the development of all its researchers, from early career to senior leadership, and supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers at all levels. This is integral to the central tenet of LSBU's *Research and Development Strategy 2030*, fostering 'a research and innovation culture that embraces team-based interdisciplinary collaboration, and values creativity, scholarship and intellectual contributions with societal application'. To achieve this, Researcher Development is embedded in the three Academic Colleges, the responsibility of the Associate Deans, Research and Innovation (ADRI) who lead Research and Innovation (R&I) Committees with representation from researchers at all career stages, from Early Career Researcher (ECR) to Professor. ECR's and Contract Researchers (CRs) are at the heart of development capabilities, with a dedicated and funded ECR Group led by an ECR Ambassador who leads on development and mentoring initiatives and other opportunities, with ECR representatives from all Colleges. Researcher Development and Concordat responsibilities are overseen by the Researcher Development Group (RDG), reporting to the University Research and Innovation Committee (URIC) with representation from all researcher cohorts, which has responsibility for the Concordat and the university's researcher development mission 'to create an environment that attracts and fosters the very best research staff, who feel their achievements are equally and fairly valued, rewarded and representative of LSBU's core values'. Research activity at LSBU is driven by five interdisciplinary Research Centres (and related College Research Groups), which are integral to LSBU's research excellence culture, working alongside the College R&I Committees.

### Impact of LSBU re-organisation, 2023-24

LSBU underwent two major re-organisations, associated with challenging economic factors affecting many institutions during this period. **Firstly**, LSBU's **Research Support services** were evaluated and reconstituted as **Research & Innovation Services (RIS)**, permitting greater integration of research services. **Organisational Development** was also subject to re-organisation, and **LSBU Doctoral College** was created to support PGR and ECR colleagues. **Secondly**, LSBU was restructured, transforming its six academic schools into three academic colleges: **College of Health & Life Sciences**; **College of Technology & Environment**; **College of Society & Professions**. LSBU's organisation change included voluntary severance/redundancy schemes that impacted some outcomes of the 2022-25 action plan. While this challenging time saw departure of some research staff, LSBU remained committed to supporting its researcher community.

### **LSBU's Internal evaluation process**

Internal evaluation of the Implementation review and action plans was overseen by the Research and Innovation Services (RIS), Learning and Organisational Development (L&OD) and the LSBU Doctoral College (LDC). RIS supports researchers in the following areas: Research and Innovation bid support; Internal funding and sabbaticals; Research systems and Centre support and review; tracking and identifying LSBU research activities and impact; annual researcher auditing review; REF preparation and review; researcher integrity support researcher development events and opportunities, while LDC oversees management and delivery of PGR programmes; and the support of ECR and Contract Researchers. L&OD has responsibility for staff surveys; appraisal; training and development, well-being and mental health initiatives. Internal review comprised three stages:

- A. *Review of the Implementation Plan*** by the RDG. RDG has responsibility for the university's compliance with the principles of the Concordat for Researcher Development, and manages the action and implementation plans, reporting to the URIC for scrutiny. URIC has overall responsibility for the implementation and oversight of research activities at LSBU, with responsibility for LSBU's research strategy, researcher development, and PGR development led by the LDC Academic Lead. Review of the plan was carried out through RDG, which involves participation from researchers, research leaders, ADRI, L&OD, RIS and LDC. RDG was temporarily suspended during LSBU's re-organisation period of 2023-24 and reconstituted in Nov. 2024, though researcher development continued to remain a focus of URIC. The Action Plan and Implementation Review documentation was fully reviewed at four meetings of the RDG in 2024-25, which considered progress against the submission of the three-year implementation plan, and actions carried forward. The Implementation Review was agreed and ratified by the RDG meetings on 15 Dec. 2024 and 6 Mar. 25; the forward Action Plan was developed and agreed at meetings on the 10 Jul. and 2 Oct. 2025; feedback was sought from Vitae on the action plans and used to shape both documents. Annual statements of RDG/Concordat actions are a standing item on the agenda of the URIC, with progress review on 28 May 2025 and a final preparatory review on 22 Sept. 2025.
- B. *Researcher engagement and dissemination***, involved all tiers of research leadership and sought feedback on the 2022-25 implementation plan and 2025-28 future action plan. The PVC-R&I carried out a series of research forums with researchers and research leaders during the development of the current LSBU Research and Innovation Strategy, which influenced our approach to the development of the new HREiRA action plan. Development of the action plan involved: **1**, discussion of action and implementation plans at URIC and engagement of researchers at RDG; **2**, feedback from the ADRI at College R&I Committee meetings; **3**, feedback from the following individuals/interest groups: the Professoriate (representing all professors at LSBU); the ECR Ambassador/ECR Group; College Ethics & Integrity leads; College Research Days and Research Centres gathering feedback from researchers at all grades; LSBU EDI Lead/EDI representatives; **4**, participation in Research Centre Review meetings to identify future actions; **5**, networking events with researchers and PGR students in the LSBU Doctoral College, Summer Schools (2024, 2025); **6**, feedback from staff engagement survey 2024; **7**, feedback from CEDARS and PRES surveys.
- C. *Update*** of the Implementation Plan and Action Plan was completed by RIS under oversight of the RDG and URIC, in association with L&OD.

### **Key Achievements and Progress Against Action Plan 2020-22**

Against the backdrop of organisation change, developments to strengthen the research environment have seen, in 2022-25: employment of a PVC R&I and development of LSBU's *Research & Innovation Strategy 2030*. This focusses research activity into five University

Interdisciplinary Research Centres aligned with our strengths: **Health & Wellbeing; Digital & Data; Bioscience & Bioengineering; Energy, Materials & Environment;** and **Building Future Communities**. LSBU's researcher development ambitions within the strategy are to: *attract, retain and develop outstanding research and innovation leaders and provide an infrastructure for their success; and to provide outstanding postgraduate research education and supervision*. To support these ambitions College ADRIs are responsible for enhancing the research environment and the development of researchers and staff; the ECR Ambassador is responsible for the development of ECR/Contract Research Staff through the ECR Group. RIS and LSBU Doctoral College work alongside L&OD and the Centre for Research Informed Teaching (CRIT) to deliver these goals.

### **Principle 1: *Environment and Culture***

**Awareness and engagement:** Though reorganisation and restructuring during 2023-24 had an impact, LSBU's research environment was maintained and strengthened through the PVC R&I, publication of the 2030 research strategy and creation of the new Research Centres and Groups. Governance was enhanced through the College R&I Committees, with representation from research leaders to researchers at all stages. The RDG was re-established in Nov. 2024 as part of the governance of research changes at LSBU. The IRG carried out its work of considering actions in improving diversity in research at LSBU and this has been replaced by the new Inclusive Researcher & REF EDI Advisory Group in 2025. The Annual University Research Audit survey was supplanted by a more sustainable approach and national benchmarked CEDARS survey, now an integral part of LSBU's research environment, following successful engagement with PRES in 2023 and 2025.

**Well-being & mental health:** A significant step has been the introduction of a consistent universal workload allocation model providing staff with Research & Scholarly Activity Time, and individual time for other Research & Enterprise activities. The ECR Ambassador/ECR Group provides an important focus for ECRs and contract researchers with 33 training sessions offered for 2024-25, with satisfaction at 80%+. A flagship for researchers has been the Research Sabbatical Scheme delivered by the former Research Office from 2016-2023 with 56 sabbaticals awarded, 77% of which were to women; after a year's break for evaluation, the scheme, led by RIS, delivered an additional 6 awards to ECR staff for delivery of research objectives in 2025. L&OD has supported with its menopause events and the creation of a well-being module in the Good Managers Programme, and delivery of the *Feeling Good, Working Better* programme. The Staff Wellbeing & Engagement Strategy launched in 2024 delivers a '*high engagement, high wellbeing*' approach.

**Bullying & harassment, EDI:** The EDI lead has ensured that the work of the Dignity at Work Advisors have been expanded, and LSBU's approach to bullying and harassment was revised in 2024-25, with mandatory training module on this area that have led to more staff reporting these matters and recognition of the policies in place. EDI awareness has been enhanced by the work of the IRG and the Inclusive Researcher & REF EDI Advisory Group.

**Researcher integrity:** is a strong focus for LSBU, with a new Research Ethics & Integrity Lead, a commitment to reporting, and the provision of integrity training for all levels.

**Policy development:** Appointment of an APVC R&I and following, a PVC R&I, strengthened this area of work and governance, leading to the publication of LSBU's *Research & Innovation Strategy 2030*, after extensive consultation with researchers at all stages. This has led to the focus on specialisms in the development of the five new research centres, and the strengthening of research leadership through the College ADRIs, with wide participation from ECR/Contract Researchers through to Professor. Successful engagement with CEDARS (2025) and PRES (2023, 2025) surveys provides important grass-roots insights, that supports the direction of travel for research at LSBU.

### **Principle 2: *Employment***

**Recruitment & Induction:** Induction was in place for all staff in the period 2022-23, and was resumed in 2024-25 to run twice yearly, with 89% satisfaction of attendees, with 58% of research staff finding it useful/very useful. Specific researcher Induction was re-introduced in 2024 supported by RIS, with 22 attendees and 68% positive response on CEDARS.

**Recognition, reward and promotion:** As a signatory of the DORA principles, LSBU makes no use of metrics in the appointment or promotion of research staff. In the promotions process, there has been an increased use of the staff circumstances procedure to support colleagues, which is a positive step. The introduction of the PURE Research Management System in 2024-25 permits researchers to highlight the achievements in their research profiles. In 2024, a new annual Research & Innovation Festival was launched, which included recognition of researchers, with 8 awards from 108 nominations.

**Responsibilities & reporting:** DORA responsibilities are emphasised, alongside other integrity principles in Integrity training still in development. Training of researchers by RIS provided opportunity to emphasise reporting requirements for all successful bid teams.

**People management:** The Good Manager Programme was put on hold, replaced by two leadership programmes having good uptake, with confidence in line managers at 67% in staff survey. The PDR process has a completion rate of 76% currently, with LSBU aiming to improve effectiveness, supported by the introduction of the new universal workload.

Mentoring was to have been subject to a review, though this proved to be challenging; however, a new mentoring scheme through ADRIs and professors is being implemented.

**Job security:** Though 2023-24 was challenging for this area. LSBU committed to the use of fixed-term contracts only where necessary; work is in progress to ensure continuity of access to facilities for contract researchers where needed.

### **Principle 3: Professional & Career Development**

**Championing professional development:** Mentoring was to have been subject to a review, though this proved to be challenging; although this was achieved, a new mentoring scheme managed by the college ADRis was implemented; compliance with mandatory training is actively monitored.

**Career development reviews:** The PDR process is under active review and will lead to a new process in 2025, which forms part of the 2025-28 action plan.

**Career development support & planning:** Research mentoring is under development; RIS put in place a comprehensive set of training sessions in line with the RDF domains, to deliver researcher effectiveness and career support. Promotions were subject to review in 2023-24, but following this process, have been effectively rolled out in 2025.

**Research identity & leadership:** The new Epigeum programme added 22 new PGR supervisors, and the renewed research Sabbaticals scheme in 2025 delivered 6 new sabbaticals; 86% of the recipients were women. The new research centres, introduced in 2024 following wide consultation and each has a range of members, including ECRs and Research-only staff. Research impact training was supported by *The Conversation* training which received 80%+ positive feedback. Research and Enterprise forums were organised to support wider engagement in enterprise activity, with a majority identifying their value.

**Diverse careers:** The Springboard scheme provided a total of 31 grants to support ECR and contract research staff training and development in diverse research activities. Training was provided by both the ECR Ambassador and RIS to support career development. The External Engagement Forum (EEF) was successful in fostering external engagement with potential partners outside LSBU, leading on discovery days and connector events.

### **Strategic Objectives and Implementation Plan 2025-28**

LSBU's strategy has at its core the following researcher development principles that have informed its approach to development of the Action Plan 2025-28: *Enhance the quality and reach of our research and innovation in areas of strength; Promote a collaborative, thriving*

*and interdisciplinary research and innovation culture; Champion inclusivity, diversity and sustainability; Attract, retain and develop outstanding research and innovation leaders and provide an infrastructure for their success.* This underlines LSBU's commitment to the three Concordat principles of: 1, Environment & Culture; 2, Employment; and 3, Professional & Career Development. Positive steps are the work of the RDG; engagement of the PVC R&I with researchers at all stages since appointment; the creation of the university Workload Allocation model; the integration of the research support services; and the development of a Research Staff Career Pathway for contract researchers to build security and recognition.

### **Highlights of the 2025-28 Action Plan**

**Principle 1: Environment & Culture:** **a**, Establishment of the Inclusive Researcher REF EDI Group support diversity of researchers in REF2029; **b**, Engagement in RCLS 2027 and establishment of interim surveys to ensure researchers are heard; **c**, Systematic capturing of training feedback and establishment of Return on Investment (ROI) model to help improve impact; **d**, annual review of RDG membership to ensure adequate representation; **e**, Mentoring support for ECRs and Contract Researchers through the Professoriate; **f**, ECR supervision of Chancellor Scholarships to build leadership and building of closer ECR links with the LDC; **g**, Review of the effectiveness of the Workload Allocation Model introduced in 2025; **h**, Introduction and development of the Research Staff Career Pathway to support and retain contract researchers; **i**, Delivery of the Manager Programme for all staff, 2026; **j**, Review of the Bullying and Harassment policy, and provision of training; **k**, Review of LSBU's Report and Support campaign to combat negative behaviours; **l**, Development of the work of the Inclusive Researcher & REF EDI Group and establishment of relevant training initiatives to support positive behaviours; **m**, Cementing researcher integrity in all post-award meetings and provision of integrity training; **n**, Creation of PGR/ECR focus groups to gather feedback on development; **o**, Creation of PVC R&I drop in sessions to discuss research development, careers and research priorities.

**Principle 2: Employment:** **a**, Development of a Research Staff Career Pathway, providing the possibility for researchers to progress through grades from Research Associate (Grade 5) to Senior Research Fellow (Grade 8); **b**, Induction programmes on three levels – Institutional, Research-focussed, and College-based to support new starters; **c**, Equality Impact assessments of promotions through Staff Circumstances procedure; **d**, ECR supervised Chancellor Scholarships to provide experience; **e**, Research & Innovation festival to celebrate success; **f**, Support of managers through the Good Manager programme; **g**, Effective training of researchers to support their post-award research management; **h**, PDRs providing researchers with opportunity to discuss clear objectives and role development.

**Principle 3: Professional & Career Development:** **a**, Engagement in the RCLS 2027 and establishment of interim surveys to ensure researchers are heard; **b**, Systematic capturing of training feedback and establishment of Return on Investment (ROI) model to help improve impact; **c**, Creation of PGR/ECR focus groups to gather feedback on development; **d**, Creation of PVC R&I drop in sessions to discuss research development and priorities; **e**, Encouraging engagement with the PDR process annually; **f**, Development of a Research Staff Career Pathway, providing the possibility for contract researchers to progress; **g**, Development of PURE portal and researcher profiles; **h**, Impact training delivery by The Conversation; **i**, Delivery of Springboard Scheme to support ECRs in career development; **j**, Creation of a Shadowing scheme to provide researchers to observe other roles; **k**, Development of the Business links coordination group to link researchers to opportunities.