



UNIVERSITY
of York

UNIVERSITY OF YORK RESEARCH CULTURE ACTION PLAN 2024-2030

A THRIVING RESEARCH COMMUNITY

Creating the conditions and culture within which diverse people, ideas and approaches can flourish is at the heart of the University's Research Strategy 2023-30. The Strategy's first objective - to create a thriving research community - is focused on enabling our community to work with integrity, build equitable and respectful collaborations, and seek and tackle new intellectual challenges.

This Research Culture Action Plan sets out our ambitions and plans for meeting that strategic objective by developing and growing our research culture. It's based on the feedback we received from you, our research community, about how you feel about our research environment.



OUR VISION FOR RESEARCH CULTURE

We want the University of York to be known for its thriving research culture, and for it to be a place where people want to work and undertake research. We want our staff and students to feel safe and supported while undertaking their roles, and for them to feel included in our wider research community and celebrated for their part in our achievements. We also want people to feel comfortable to speak up when things aren't right, to challenge outdated assumptions, and to create an environment where we can build on our successes, but also learn from our failures. We strive to build a community that is creative, collaborative, collegial, and inclusive, and practises respect for everyone involved in all aspects of the research process. This Action Plan sets out some steps to achieve this.



PLAYING OUR PART

The University's Research Strategy 2023-30 seeks to promote both "independent minds and a collective spirit." We know that when it comes to research, great minds don't think alike, and, when properly harnessed, diversity within research communities and teams leads to better outcomes. We also believe that developing a strong research culture is about nurturing ideas, supporting ambition, developing collaboration and bringing people together to make connections and share good practice. In that spirit, this Research Culture Action Plan is a community document: it's for all of us within York's research community to consider, action and develop. Research culture is both an individual and a collective responsibility.

Building a sense of community for our staff and students and bringing people together is one of the cornerstones of our developing research culture. Networks established by our staff and students include the PRISMs Network for staff involved in the delivery of research investments, the ReDSI Network for staff and postgraduate researchers engaged in software development, a growing pool of Early Career Researcher (ECR) forums, and the Anti-Racism Working Group, a collaboration between postgraduate and early career researchers which organises a range of events including a cross-institutional annual conference with York St John University.



MAKING CHANGE

The dangers of allowing poor research culture to go unchecked are readily apparent in the higher education sector, leading to stress and impact on mental health, overworking, lack of progression and damaged working relationships. Change is essential to enable progress, and this often involves questioning assumptions and practices, and reassessing long-established and normalised ways of doing things. This can be challenging, but it can also be exciting and invigorating.

The pace of change in research culture at the moment is swift, and we realise our priorities and approaches will evolve over time. This Action Plan is not a static document: it will be updated as we move forward, reflecting our progress as well as shifts in understanding and ambitions. The Plan also aims to be realistic about change. Culture can't be changed overnight, and this plan extends to 2030, in line with our Research Strategy. We know change takes time, and some of the actions in the Plan are first steps towards achieving bigger ambitions.

The Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP) is a £4.6m Research England-funded project co-led by Dr Karen Clegg and based at York which aims to transform the culture of doctoral supervision and education. The project, conducted in partnership with 20 universities and over 400 doctoral students, will also draw on the expertise of more than 100 supervisors from major industries including GSK, Unilever, the BBC, and the Royal Shakespeare Company. It will facilitate discussions about how to properly recognise, reward and professionalise doctoral research supervision, ensuring the highest levels of support for both postgraduate researchers and their supervisors.



CONNECTING THE DOTS

As an institution, we have a long history of considering and addressing our work environment, and we're proud of activities like our mentoring programmes, Open Research Awards and Advocates scheme, and leading cross-institutional initiatives such as the Yorkshire Consortium for Equity in Doctoral Education (YCEDE). Workload is a key issue affecting our research community which the University Executive Board has committed to resolve. This Action Plan sets out some steps to inform the Workload Joint Working Group's efforts through a focus on the particular demands research produces. We also recognise the many longstanding efforts within departments and research groups to strengthen our research environment, as evidenced, for example, by the Athena Swan awards held by many of our departments.

We've made a number of commitments to change by signing up to national and international agreements including the Researcher Development Concordat, Technician Commitment, and DORA. This Plan links up with our work through these agreements, and provides a way for us to see the bigger picture and to learn from and connect our activities, including finding ways to share innovative, successful initiatives with others who could benefit from a similar approach.

The Action Plan is closely linked to the University Research Strategy, and follows its aims, timeframe and structure in providing ways forward for implementing the People and Culture strategic priority. It also incorporates the four broader University principles:

- Equality, diversity and inclusion - through a focus on diverse research teams, staff and student communities; and by providing the resources and knowledge to put equality at the centre of our research practices;
- Collaboration - through the establishment and growth of networks and community-building events;
- Environmental sustainability - through a commitment to providing tools and guidance for our community to help make our research as sustainable as possible;
- Internationalism - through initiatives to decolonise research and develop equity in our global research partnerships.

Our challenges and opportunities are often mirrored at other universities, and we aim to learn from each other, to share our experiences for the wider good, and to work together where collaborative effort can offer additional benefits or amplify our voices.

We work closely on research culture initiatives with other research-intensive universities in the north of England, through the N8 partnership, exploring topics together such as supporting established researchers and our technicians. The N8 joined forces to produce a statement outlining our response to the TALENT Commission report on technicians' careers. Working together with other institutions can help us share best practice and engage with and influence funders and government bodies to try to achieve sectoral culture change.



LEADING CULTURAL CHANGE

Culture is formed and nourished through our daily interactions: among colleagues, within teams, across research groups and in departments. We know that it isn't something that can be imposed from the top down, and our role as a University is to provide the systems to support positive culture and connect people and activities. We also have to be clear and reactive about negative behaviours such as bullying and harassment, which are not tolerated anywhere in the University.

Dr Anna Bull has been leading a project to address sexual harassment of postgraduate researchers. The project piloted sessions on awareness of professional boundaries and sexual harassment for PGRs and staff from three departments/Schools at the University, as well as training for HR staff on handling sexual harassment complaints. This work will form the basis of future activity to address this important issue.

Universities are inherently hierarchical structures but research culture is an area where we can all take a leadership role. Those with line management and supervisory experience have a responsibility to promote a healthy, inclusive and reflective culture within their teams, and those nearer the start of

their careers have key roles in helping challenge and change the norms as they move through the system.

This Action Plan acknowledges that everyone in our research community has an important part to play in creating and sustaining a positive research culture, and we all deserve to be valued and rewarded for the contributions we make. Historically, not all research staff have been recognised equally: technicians and professional services staff, who enable research, have typically not been afforded the respect and thanks they deserve; postgraduate researchers are often seen as being "just" students, rather than researchers in training; and there is a neglected middle in the researcher journey, with established researchers typically not receiving targeted support. To rectify this, across the University's research groups, project teams and departments, we will seek out examples of good practice in recognising and supporting such staff, and learn from these.

Valuing Voices for Equitable and Responsible Research is a research culture change project funded by the Wellcome Trust (2024-26) that aims to embed equitable and responsible research practices at York and our project partner, Mahidol University in Thailand. The project will explore

equitable team structures and ways of valuing the voices and contributions of all team members, regardless of role or career stage.

Our innovative work on research culture through sector-defining projects such as YCEDE, RSVP and Valuing Voices demonstrates the University's commitment to leading change in the field. We're ambitious about how York research staff and York approaches can spearhead research culture change at national and international levels, and how our work on these issues can improve experiences for research staff and students beyond our institution.



THE NEW NORMAL

Achieving positive research culture change which benefits everyone in our research community is about normalising thoughtful, inclusive, and supportive practices. The new normal should include senior staff thinking about how they support junior researchers, and for our research teams and units to be reflective about how academic, technical and professional staff work together for shared research success. It should make us think about whose work we cite and whose contributions we credit, and the range of people with different backgrounds, perspectives and experiences within our teams, who enrich the questions we ask and the solutions we seek.

York green chemistry students use a method known as “Matharu plots” designed by Professor Avtar Matharu at the University to help ensure they never again draw solely on US, EU or UK research. By looking up the country and institution of all authors on the papers they cite, they’re able to construct a bar chart and consider the trends in the cited authorship ensuring that research from across the world is considered.



OUR ACTION PLAN

York's Research Culture Action Plan 2024-2030 aims to live its own values: to be consultative, open, dynamic, inclusive, reflective and reflexive. It is our Action Plan as a research community, and York research staff and students should feel that it is for them and about them, and addresses the issues and opportunities you raised. As an institution we welcome input on our activities to improve research culture at any stage. We will continue to seek your views, and to measure our progress through consultation, surveys and evaluating the success of programmes of work and activities. The Research Culture Working Group will review the Action Plan twice a year to monitor progress and identify areas for change and development.

Communicating our research culture values, what we expect from our research staff and postgraduate students, and what you can expect from the University, is a key element in embedding a strong research culture. We'll make sure we have opportunities to share best practice along the way, showcase the new approaches we introduce, and provide the information you need to deliver our collective research ambitions in the research environment you deserve.

The table below sets out our aims for each section of the Research Culture Action Plan.



Focus area	Aims	What does success look like?	How could we monitor progress?
<p>1. Nurture a sustainable and progressive research culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed positive research culture at York, institutionally and within departments and research groups • Create the framework to support a positive research culture by developing underpinning policies and structures • Better connect our research community and make all research staff feel part of a collegial and collaborative culture • Create a safe, supportive and equitable working environment • Diversify our research staff community and our research teams • Ensure internal and external communications about research are inclusive and represent our values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive research culture is a part of the fabric of the organisation: it is considered and valued at the points where research is planned, designed and evaluated • Our everyday processes help to embed our research culture values through clear and supportive policies and systems • More of our research staff and students connect with colleagues through opportunities to come together and collaborate • An environment in which colleagues feel safe from harassment and bullying, with a collective commitment to establishing boundaries and zero tolerance of negative behaviour, and the knowledge and structures to support action • A more diverse community bringing a range of cultural and social experiences to our research, with a wider variety of staff roles and career stages recognised via co-I and PI roles • Communications that recognise and celebrate a wider range of research team members, research projects and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting on departmental culture in the Annual Research Review • Staff surveys • Analysis of systems data on leadership roles in research applications • Staff diversity metrics • Monitoring and reporting on research communications

Focus area	Aims	What does success look like?	How could we monitor progress?
<p>2. Create career paths, incentives and reward mechanisms that develop and encourage all members of the research community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove the barriers between researchers, technical and professional staff, and between staff and students, by focusing on the needs of the research community as a whole • Help everyone in the research community to gain the skills and experience they need for a rewarding career by providing the support required for different roles and at different career stages • Ensure citizenship and good research culture is properly recognised and rewarded • Credit and celebrate the contributions of all those involved in the research endeavour • Increase talent mobility between academia and industry/the public sector, broaden our idea of the background and skill sets required for roles, and provide secure career paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research team members feel their contribution is recognised and celebrated, and that they are a valued member of the research community • Research staff and students feel their training needs are met and their career pathways are open and flexible, with greater engagement with a wide range of training opportunities and uptake of the ten days professional development time for postdoctoral researchers, technicians and postgraduate researchers • New reward and recognition structures support our research culture values, and people are thanked and acknowledged appropriately in research outputs and within their departments or teams • Recruitment and selection systems and panels align with our aspirations to diversify our research community in all respects, welcoming more staff who will bring new perspectives to our research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Survey and Postgraduate Researcher Experience Survey (PRES) data • Training evaluation • Implementation of and engagement with new reward and recognition systems • Evidence of use of new guidance on fair attribution processes

Focus area	Aims	What does success look like?	How could we monitor progress?
<p>3. Provide time and reward for staff to deliver on the institution’s research and impact ambitions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore ways to manage the workload of researchers and research-enabling staff to allow them to concentrate on strategic, exploratory or novel ideas which can push forward our research agenda and help attract the resources to support and sustain them • Minimise bureaucracy and make research processes clear and equitable • Build stable career paths within research roles • Promote a healthy work-life balance and an environment which values and supports the wellbeing of our staff and students • Acknowledge and explore ways to address the demands on time for different groups, including those with caring responsibilities and colleagues with disabilities • Value all kinds of research and the expertise within different disciplines and faculties, and foster collaboration between them • Find new ways to celebrate our successes and learn from our failures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the introduction of measures to help address workloads during challenging times for the sector, staff and students feel their workload is manageable, their work-life balance positive, and that they have the support they need to engage in research activities that drive knowledge acquisition in all its forms • Research information and policies are clear and accessible • More comprehensive data is available on research staff contract types, the experiences of different staff groups, and individuals’ career trajectories, and research staff benefit from more stable employment opportunities • A commitment to individual and communal reflexive practice to learn from failure and celebrate all those responsible for successes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff survey data • Research information review • Staff contracts review and interventions to promote stable careers implemented • Analysis of effects of new PRISM systems on Faculty • Evaluation of the Valuing Voices project and use of Equitable and Responsible Research Tool • Monitoring and reporting on research communications

Focus area	Aims	What does success look like?	How could we monitor progress?
<p>4. Meet the needs of our postgraduate research student community from recruitment to graduation and beyond</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a more diverse and inclusive PGR community • Provide the highest quality supervision, mentoring and support for research and career development • Promote collaborative, responsible research practices for the next generation of academics • Involve PGRs in the activities and life of their home department, and connect PGRs across the institution • Equip our PGRs for future careers inside or outside academia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through revised recruitment and selection processes and additional support for PGRs from underrepresented backgrounds, our PGR community develops to encompass a greater range of diversity • PGRs have a supportive, enabling experience at York, with well trained and highly skilled supervisors, mentors and advisors • PGRs engage in opportunities to learn about collaborative and responsible research practices • PGRs feel a sense of belonging and that their contribution to the research community is valued, both within their home department and across the University • Postgraduate researchers are well informed about their career options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EDI data on PGR community • Postgraduate Researcher Experience Survey (PRES) results analysis • Training completion data

Focus area	Aims	What does success look like?	How could we monitor progress?
<p>5. Embed the principles and culture of open research and responsible research and innovation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a positive impact on society, and consider societal impact throughout the lifecycle of research projects • Ensure our research is easy to access for researchers and the public • Make our research reproducible wherever possible to extend its application and allow others to build on the knowledge created • Develop an environment where colleagues understand research integrity and its applicability to their roles • Be open and responsible in all of our research practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater range of research for the public good, as evidenced through new case studies to highlight the impact of our research • Greater engagement with open research training and open research practices • Higher levels of reproducible research practices • Understanding of research integrity is embedded into research induction, training, and ongoing conversations around research, and everyone in our research community understands their responsibilities • Development and adoption of tools to help researchers engage with responsible, equitable and results-focused research practices that support positive societal impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of open and reproducible research outputs • Annual reporting on development of open research practices and open research survey data • Monitoring of the use of the Equitable and Responsible Research Tool (Valuing Voices) to address equity, responsibility and a focus on results-based planning in research design • Annual statement on Research Integrity



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