

Institution: Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh

1. Context and mission

QMU, is a small, modern (post-92) University with a total of 247 (198.27 FTE) academic staff of whom 88 (76.8FTE) have Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) and Research Independence (RI). The University gained research degree awarding powers in 1998 and secured university status in 2007. Our vision is to achieve an international research profile that ranks QMU as one of the leading post-92 universities in Scotland, supported by a culture where researchers pursue bold ideas, are creative and work to the highest standards, and in doing so, undertake research that acts as an impetus for innovation, delivers impact and enables economic growth.

We have a distinct academic portfolio including the specialist areas of healthcare; drama and the creative industries; media, communication and sociology; and business, management and enterprise, and these disciplines are reflected in the composition of our academic divisions and Research Centres (RCs). Our research and teaching nexus allows creativity and innovation to flow into the delivery of our programmes.

We have a diverse body of 7,600 students, including nearly 2,500 studying with partners overseas. We also offer doctoral level studies through our Graduate School (GS). The University's strategy is to maintain and enhance its pockets of research excellence while promoting the highest standards of integrity, and maximising impact in a research environment that is vibrant, inclusive and sustainable. Our research is focused on improving quality of life and building the evidence base for policy and practice through world-leading interdisciplinary, translational research and external collaboration.

Central to our mission are our regional roots and international influence. Located in the Edinburgh City area, we are the only University in East Lothian and are therefore uniquely embedded in the regional community, serving a civic and economic function as an institution with national and international influence. Through the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal (ESESCRD) we are seeking to elevate our position as a collaborator that provides connectivity and coherence in innovation and is strategically integrated into the regional growth agenda, with £30 million secured to offer opportunities for industrial collaboration with the University research base.

Our research vision is global in focus, supporting our wider strategic objective of increased international reach. Our reputation in international health exemplifies this ambition well. Alongside doctoral study programmes attracting students from across Asia, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and North America, we have increasingly leveraged major prestigious competitive international funding.

We work at the intersection of conventional disciplinary groupings to create innovative approaches to contemporary societal challenges and public discourse; and make a significant contribution to the creation and sharing of knowledge that reaches and influences a broad range of regional and international stakeholders. Consequently, research is delivered through our School of Health Sciences and School of Arts, Social Sciences and Management and supported through a structure of the following six interdisciplinary RCs:

- Centre for Health and Rehabilitation Research
- Centre for Applied Social Sciences
- Centre for Person-centred Practice Research
- Clinical Audiology, Speech and Language Research Centre
- Centre for Communication, Cultural and Media Studies
- Institute for Global Health and Development

2. Strategy

Following REF 2014 our research strategy was reviewed through a Post REF away day and a series of Working Groups to ensure that it would enable our strategic ambitions, our evolving capabilities and the changing nature of the external research environment. We reviewed the validity and direction of our historic research groupings and in 2015 launched the six interdisciplinary RCs detailed above.

The strategic aims underpinning our institutional strategy for research, innovation and impact reflect an evolving culture focused on research excellence, collaboration, and developing critical mass and sustainability. Over the census period our focus has been on the delivery of the following four strategic objectives with key achievements summarised below:

Strategy Objective 2015-2020 and Key Achievements

Objective 1: People

- In the **first cohort of 5 UK HEIs to submit for the 10 Year HR Excellence Award** for the Concordat for Researcher Development and one of the first 15 UK HEIs to publically commit to the new 2019 Concordat.
- **1 of only 22 UK HEIs to participate in the pilot UK Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey 2020 (CEDARS)**. With a response rate of 31%, CEDARS has been a useful measure of researcher experience and the success of our research environment strategy and policy interventions.
- CEDARS feedback has been used to further enhance our Concordat for Researcher Development Action Plan 2020-22
- Development and launch of a **New Workload Allocation Model and Performance Enhancement Review (PER)**.
- **Inspiring Female Researcher Exhibition** and **EntreprenHER** event on the **commercialisation of research** with our chancellor Prue Leith.
- Principles of **Athena SWAN** embedded within an institutional action plan.
- **Investment in new inter-institutional collaborative mentoring programmes and implementation of research development plans, including local peer to peer buddying for female researchers**. Development of new inter-institutional research mentoring schemes due for launch in 2021 including COVID-19 rapid response mentoring for Contract Research Staff (CRS).
- **Legacy Researcher Policy introduced** to support continuity of employment for CRS.
- **Sabbaticals Policy reviewed** and refreshed.

Objective 2: Excellence

- **Creation, launch and sustained investment in six interdisciplinary strategic RCs**, subject to formal annual review against agreed institutional KPIs.
- Increased overall submission from 5 Unit of Assessments in 2014 to 7 in 2021 with emerging strengths in Drama and Education.
- Awarded **substantial research funding from prestigious international sources**.
- **Collegial support for research writing activity**, with time allocated for Early Career Researchers (ECRs) to write papers and bids.
- Enhanced QMU's role in the British Council's **EURAXESS** programme to support researcher mobility.
- **QMU Research Studentship Bursary** programme.

Objective 3: Impact

- Launch in 2016 of a **new Research Impact Strategy**.
- New **collaboration manifesto marking 10 years of academic partnership as part of the Edinburgh Beltane Network for Public Engagement with Research**.
- **Dedicated training initiatives** targeting specific groups i.e. female, CRS and ECRs.

- Launch of QMU's bi-annual **Enterprise Skills month** in recognition of the pivotal role entrepreneurship plays in enhancing researcher skills.
- Host of the **only Scottish University on-campus Business Gateway** service in partnership with East Lothian Council to support spin out and SME translational skills.
- **Investment in and launch of new QMU Innovation Fellowships.**
- **£30 million secured for research and innovation as part of the ESESCRD.**
- Development and implementation of a **new Easy IP Policy.**
- One of the **first Scottish HEIs to sign up to the Knowledge Exchange (KE) Concordat.**

Objective 4: Environment

- **Wellcome Research Café Culture** events to reflect and propose solutions for developing a better research culture and reflect on CEDARS findings. Activities that will contribute to improving the research culture, include: implementation of an **equality, diversity and inclusion plan**; supporting researchers in **career development**; and delivery of a range of **researcher wellbeing and mental health workshops** in collaboration with other Scottish HEIs.
- **Membership of the Scottish GS for Arts and Humanities (SGSAH) and Graduate School for Social Sciences (GSSS).**
- An **enhanced and restructured Research Grants and Contracts Unit** with a streamlined service for pre and post award support.
- Institutionally the total amount of external research income secured between 1 August 2013 and 31 July 2020 was £ 14,011,897.00.
- A total of 665 external research grant applications were submitted over the census period. Our application success rate was 24.5%.
- Institutional **membership of the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO)** since 2018.

QMU is committed to the [Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research](#) and was delighted to become an early **signatory to the [National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement \(NCCPE\) Manifesto for Public Engagement](#)**. Becoming a signatory provided an opportunity to elevate our commitment to PE, exploring how these principles could become embedded within our research culture, incorporating the perspectives of stakeholders, user communities and members of the public.

After 10 years of collaboration with the other Edinburgh Universities, **the Beltane Public Engagement Partnership** continues to thrive following the signing by the four partners of a new Manifesto in 2018. We have delivered numerous successful collaborative researcher events including Explorathon, Bright Club, Cabaret of Dangerous Ideas and the hugely successful Beltane Gathering in June of each academic year. The Gathering brings researchers from the partner institutions into multidisciplinary groups, focusing on collaboration in public engagement around the Grand Challenges. Future priority will be given to raising the profile of the collaboration, building on the increasing policy priority of regional cohesion through our ESESCRD. We are an active member of the new Scottish Parliament Academic Network (SPAN). The network builds on an existing collaboration set up in 2014 between the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICE), Scotland's Futures Forum, Beltane and the Scottish Universities Insight Unit to encourage collaboration and knowledge exchange between the Scottish Parliament and the academic community. The Beltane allows partner universities to share good practice, build on reciprocal researcher training arrangements and supports interdisciplinary pathways to impact.

Institutional support for the **Concordat for Open Research** via a **Research Data Management Group and policy** continues to exploit the full potential of the open innovation paradigm by exploring ways to make the outcomes of our activities and our campus more open and accessible to external partners. Following a successful collaboration with the University of St Andrews in commercialisation support, QMU has rolled out a new Intellectual Property (IP) Policy based on the principle of "Easy IP". This aligns much more closely with our institutional commitment to impact and translational research and has provided a new IP exploitation framework to maximise user engagement with our research. As Open Research Data and Open Access (OA) become

integrated into the research environment we have invested in our institutional repository to underpin new policies for OA.

Our Institutional **Statement on the Use of Metrics in Research Assessment** outlines the key role of peer review, support for an inclusive and transparent process for research assessment that is respectful of researchers and the plurality of research. This also reflects our commitment to:

- The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (**DORA**), underpinning our support for the responsible use of research metrics.
- Adopting the principles of the **Leiden Manifesto**.
- Implementing the recommendations of the **Forum for Responsible Research Metrics** and the principles of the Metric Tide Report.

We are members of the **UK Office for Research Integrity (UKRIO)** and the Scottish **Universities Research Integrity Network (SRIN)** and **Collaborative Group for Responsible Innovation**. The **Concordat for Research Integrity** is being proactively implemented, using online resources purchased under license from Dundee University and through a programme of UKRIO training. Combined with new research whistleblowing procedures, we are responding to the **new Concordat to Support Research Integrity**, providing annual progress reports to University Court.

Our **Future 5 Year Strategy** for excellence continues to be **defined by specialism, focus and interdisciplinarity**. We want to ensure that the **narrative behind our impact is more compelling**, recognising that we are a **small but agile institution**. We acknowledge that we cannot afford to disperse our research endeavour across individualistic threads when the future funding context commands a collaborative approach and interdisciplinary focus. The emphasis of our strategy will increasingly depart from lone scholar models. We will facilitate increased internal research collaboration, specifically between the arts and health as we look for sharper definition in the articulation of our distinctive identity. In 2020 we were one of the first Scottish Universities to sign up to the KE Concordat, which provides a framework for effective KE and reflects our commitment to the UKRI R&D Roadmap.

We continue to invest in areas that enhance interdisciplinarity and offer insights and solutions to major issues affecting society while supporting emerging areas that challenge convention and progress research at the interfaces between disciplines that exploit synergies to address grand challenges.

We have built on **consolidating and developing pockets of research excellence**, and increasing the quality of research outputs and impact rather than the volume. To that end, we have developed our academic workload allocation methodology to ensure research time is properly identified and adequately protected for those staff with SRR in order that we deliver the following future 5 Year Priorities:

- **Excellence** – Continue to embrace specialisation and focus, while encouraging collaboration to maximise interdisciplinary strength, so that we develop a critical mass of staff and activity with a clear goal of delivering international research excellence while nurturing nascent capability and opportunities.
- **Research Culture** – Use our Concordat for Researcher Development 2020-22 Action Plan and feedback from CEDARS to progress: employment conditions, research environment, and professional development opportunities available to researchers with increased attention to integrity, mentoring, equality, ECRS, career development, wellbeing and mental health.
- **Sustainable Funding** - Shift the balance of income generation capacity from small-scale project grants to larger grants in strategically identified areas.
- **Collaboration** - Be exemplary in our approach to collaboration and the partner of choice. Make more informed and efficient decisions about how we deploy our resources for maximum return.
- **International Influence** - Strengthen international research collaboration in response to Brexit and remain committed to being an open, inclusive and internationally-focused university.

- **Place** - Maximise the opportunities arising from ESESCRD with increased alignment with the new UKRI R&D Roadmap.

3. People

Institutional Staffing Strategy

Attracting, developing and nurturing the careers of excellent researchers at all career stages is a key priority. We currently have 16 Professors, 21 CRS and 10 Externally Funded Research Fellowships. ECRs in post-doctoral or early academic roles are supported in the development of research independence and we pro-actively support mid-career and high performing researchers to come to the forefront of their discipline or area of professional practice. Ongoing investment in Vitae and the Vitae RDF and the allocation of budgets to RCs for research and impact supports these activities. ECRs are key to vitality and vibrancy to our research environment. REF 2021 regulations required a specific and unique definition of ECR status, based on self disclosure. While our REF 2021 submission is inclusive and supportive of the excellent work of ECRs, they are not identified as ECRs as per the REF 2021 definition.

As part of our PER process and to underpin criteria for SRR and RI we have embedded research performance review as part of annual workload planning and accountability to ensure that research expectations are explicit. Generic role profiles for all research roles have been developed as part of a research job family. HR provide monthly updates to Line Managers and monitor contracts, offering additional support to researchers within the final months of contracts. CRS have bi-annual strategic meetings with the Deputy Principal to identify concerns that might require senior management intervention in professional services and other areas.

All researchers align with an RC as a full/associate/affiliate member and have the opportunity to have a regularly scheduled PER to focus on researcher career development. A research welcome pack introduces new staff to our research culture and our induction process provides an overview of key HR policies and initiatives. RCs support the development of researchers in interdisciplinary areas with regular programmes of talks, seminars and conferences; and are represented on external bodies and have strong national and international collaborations. The operating framework within which each Centre works provides opportunities for career development, innovation, mentoring, public engagement, networking and collaboration. Researchers are supported to develop networking and collaborative projects with international partners, through attending conferences and hosting visits from international research partners.

Our commitment to researcher development promotes parity of esteem in research and knowledge exchange to achieve maximum impact. Innovation and impact are now recognised in our PER process and we will build on this by celebrating impactful research through institutional strategic impact events. We want to empower our researchers to act as agents of change and encourage and enable them to share insights and maximise impact pathways. We continue to play an integral role in public discourse and evidence based decision making, injecting knowledge, informed and measured views, shaping debates and seeding new ideas. Membership of the Scottish Policy and Research Exchange (SPRE) supports our researchers in working with policymakers.

As a small HEI, we continue to use our agility to be at the forefront of sector developments. In 2020 we will be in the first cohort of only 5 UK HEIs (and first post-92 institution) to submit to the 10 Year HR Excellence Award for the Concordat for Researcher Development and were proud to be one of the first 15 UK HEIs to publically sign up to the new 2019 Concordat with our new Concordat Action Plan developed in 2020. This reaffirms QMU's commitment to working collectively in delivering the UK's ambitious economic and industrial strategies, and the role of the Concordat as a tool to necessitate the supply of well-rounded and multi-skilled researchers who can traverse the interface of academia and industry.

Wellbeing and mental health is supported by policies, procedures and risk assessments together with assistance provided via our Employee Assistance Programme as well as a range of staff

development opportunities including a wellbeing mindfulness programme. We are enhancing our profile as a Wellbeing University, using the UK Healthy Universities Network online Self-Review Tool to review and reflect on progress in embedding a whole system approach to health and wellbeing. Career development workshops, facilitated by the careers team, run twice yearly. Monthly writing retreats offer ring-fenced writing time, and six month writing programmes have offered structured support for paper writing. Opportunities for international collaboration are maximised by building on existing researcher mobility networks such as the British Council's EURAXESS.

Support for Equality and Diversity in Research Careers

We continue to champion equality and diversity in research beyond the traditional domains of Athena Swan to include the LGBT Charter and developing a leading position for QMU in Female Entrepreneurship with over 70% of our REF 2021 eligible staff being female. We promote an inclusive culture and have mainstreamed and embedded many of the new processes defined in our REF 2021 Code of Practice. We were awarded an institutional Athena SWAN Bronze Award in April 2013 and successfully renewed the Bronze Award in 2017. Since then, our Athena SWAN team has continued to progress gender equality across the institution by addressing actions set out in our Action Plan. There is a clear commitment to embedding Athena SWAN principles across our workforce.

Management information has been enhanced with a focus on protected characteristics and monitoring of the equality and diversity profile of our researchers. Equality Impact Assessments underpin all research policies and procedures. Online Equality Training for Research is supported by a bespoke training programme.

Strategy for Training Research Students

Support and training is a collaborative endeavour between the GS and RCs. Candidates are hosted by a RC which creates a sense of belonging and access to the wider research environment. Training opportunities are offered by RCs, including, research seminars, tutorials, group supervision and communities of practice. We offer a 60 credit Doctoral Certificate in Researcher Enhancement and Development (READ) as part of all Doctoral programmes. READ is based around the Vitae RDF. The programme enables the integration and synthesis of theory with practice, to enable the development of transferable research skills, to ensure the rigour of academic thinking and to promote the achievement of personal and professional goals.

A Doctoral Candidates Association organises an annual conference and twice monthly research cafes. The GS offers opportunities for all candidates to apply for training and development funds to support specific non-core training or skills development. It provides an annual two day training and development programme for supervisors. This is supplemented by update sessions on a wide range of topics and facilitated 'communicative spaces' where supervisors can share concerns and issues and engage in constructive dialogue with other supervisors. We are working to implement the UKCGE Good Supervisory Framework.

QMU belongs to the two Scottish Graduate Schools (Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities), which provide external training and learning opportunities for candidates and supervisors.

4. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Since REF 2014 we have been reflecting systematically on our performance and have seen continued research successes including major new publications and research impact, the strengthening of our global collaborations, and the securing of national and international research funding. However, the overall volume and financial value of our research income has decreased over the period, confirming that we must continue to invest in the development of the research capacity and collaborative research activity of our research community.

We progress in developing a research funding strategy that supports short-term horizons, but with a new priority focus towards long term and more sustainable funding frameworks. Internal and

external collaboration is key for income generation and we will support this with new inter-institutional mentoring schemes planned for 2021. Future approaches will shift our emphasis towards strategic priorities focused on activity where researchers are already working together on coherent and successful collaboration. We have harmonised reporting and structural boundaries for research and improved transparency and understanding of financial and budgetary methodologies. We have embedded processes to link recruitment, workload allocation modelling and academic promotion, and progressed the implementation of teaching and scholarship contracts and the systematic and strategic review of staff research objectives and targets.

In some areas we have had success in securing funding from UKRI (MRC, ESRC, ARHC, ISCF), Wellcome Trust, National Institute for Health Research, Department for International Development, Home Office, Overseas Development Agency and the National Institute for Health. Strategies for the generation of increased research income will continue to be enhanced to allow us to contribute meaningfully to grand challenges and interdisciplinary initiatives. Researchers have income generation targets and these feed into RC Plans and are monitored via the annual strategic planning process.

We have invested in an annual QMU Innovation Fellowship Scheme to develop research capacity with significant health, cultural and economic impact. Annual investment will continue to help us maximise engagement with the UK Industrial Strategy and ISCF.

An ongoing investment programme in our research laboratories and equipment - including: a complete campus wide IT refresh; interview/focus group research rooms; state of the art IT and public health materials; interview/observation suites; and enhanced connectivity of our global researcher development community via online platforms for learning practices, communications and exchanges of research ideas.

Structures to support research:

- **Research Grants and Contracts Unit (RGCU)** pre and post award support.
- **Research and Knowledge Exchange Development Unit (RKEDU)** institutional research policy and strategy; public engagement; researcher development; research governance and integrity; major strategic research projects and external collaborations; and innovation including entrepreneurship.
- **Research Support Librarian** OA publishing, research metrics and RDM. An institutional RDM Working Group acts as an advisory body for RDM. We continue to monitor OA publishing and citation and altmetric data for all our researchers including an OA policy and staff-self deposit facility.
- **Research Laboratories/Technical Services** operation and maintenance of laboratories/ specialist accommodation.
- **Marketing and Communication** support for research including PR/ media training.
- **Research Ethics and Governance training days** in partnership with NHS Lothian, and the Edinburgh Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Facility. Well-established regulations, procedures/guidelines for research ethics overseen by the Research Ethics Panel.
- **Campus-hosted external SMEs** promoting intersectoral mobility to facilitate movement of researchers between QMU/industry. Open innovation/shared SME space key to Estates Strategy.
- Ongoing external investment in the **only Scottish University on-campus Business Gateway service to support researcher SME translational skills and planned careers support on “Becoming an Independent Research Consultant”**. Collaboration with East Lothian Council to secure a financial enticement package for research start-ups to locate in the region. Partnership with Edinburgh Merchant Company with funding for Further Education/researcher collaboration.
- **Success in prestigious sector wide research commercialisation competitions.**
- **Collaborative and industry focused programmes** - THRIVE - focused on Food and Drink with Scottish Rural Universities and Colleges and Abertay University and SHIFT - focused on

Institutional level environment template (REF5a)

Creative Industries with Royal Conservatoire Scotland and Glasgow School of Art bringing researchers together to address innovation in priority economic sectors.

- Through the **ESESCR**D we are enhancing place based cohesion with regional Universities, including with the School of Informatics, University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh Napier University to understand the **potential of Artificial Intelligence and big data**.
- QMU hosts the on-campus **East Lothian Business Improvement District (BID)** The BID represents 42 SMEs and offers a great network for business engagement for our researchers.