ANALYSIS OF DIRECTORS OF RESEARCH ROLES IN UK BUSINESS SCHOOLS

July 2022

FOREWORD

As business and management schools analyse how things shaped up in the Research Excellence Framework 2021, each analysing their own performance and looking forward to the next cycle, a reflection on the role of Director of Research could not be more timely. The findings from this Chartered ABS survey bring to light key issues that feed into, and raise questions about, what Director of Research roles and responsibilities can and should look like over the forthcoming years.

Some things we learn from the survey are to be expected and align with national imperatives – it is entirely appropriate (and arguably reassuring) to learn that Directors of Research within business and management schools are concerned chiefly with developing the research environment and culture within their units, as well as focusing on the Research Excellence Framework.

Inconsistencies, such as the varying amount of discretionary research expenditure across institutions, are perhaps also unsurprising given the differences in scale and reach of the schools under consideration – though budgets might be food for thought in future discussions regarding research environments.

Arguably more pressing would be the need for schools and the wider research field to consider the issue of training and wider support available for Directors of Research. While many have benefitted from the Chartered ABS/BAM Development Programme for Directors of Research (DPDoR), this is a 'one off' programme that doesn't necessarily offer on-going development opportunities, other than among connections forged as part of the original training. For some Directors of Research, the level and relevance of training offered to them seems to have been limited – there exists a prior assumption that role-holders will already have the required knowledge and skills to undertake the role – a presumption that might underestimate the enhancement and networking opportunities that on-going specialist training could provide. This is especially pertinent in the context where the Director of Research role is changing, for instance with an ever-greater focus on impact and external funding, meaning that skills and understandings are required to be continually developed and updated.

In addition, it seems that the provision of research assistance as a resource is unusual unless Directors of Research have gained this themselves through accessing external funding (or in some cases internal pump-priming awards). If Directors of Research are to lead by experience, keeping the 'show on the road' as regards their own research, this could be an issue for business and management schools to consider as an important and justified form of support for colleagues in the Director of Research role.

In sum, this point in time offers us a chance to reflect on the Director of Research role, and to take stock and consider how to shape the research landscape within our schools and beyond. What do schools seek from those who hold Director of Research responsibilities? And what support can (and should) be offered to colleagues in the Director of Research 'hot seat' that might enable agile, dynamic and informed approaches to future research in the business and management field?

As you read through this Chartered ABS analysis, of Directors of Research Roles in UK business schools, you will find much food for thought and an opportunity to assess where we are, and where we should be heading in relation to the Director of Research role.

Professor Caroline Gatrell
Professor of Organisation Studies and Associate Dean Research, University of Liverpool Management School, and Chair, Research Committee, Chartered ABS

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INTRODUCTION

The Chartered ABS Research Committee commissioned a research project to identify the key characteristics and components of the role of research leaders in UK business schools. The purpose was to better understand how the nature of, and appointment to, such roles varies across institutions. In collaboration with the Research Committee the Chartered ABS circulated an anonymised survey to senior research contacts across its member business schools in April 2021. This report presents the findings from the survey and offers insights into the core pre-requisite attributes/skills for senior research roles, the remit of such roles, appointment processes, training and role resources, and EDI characteristics of postholders.

Methodology

The survey was sent to those with research leadership job titles as recorded on the Chartered ABS CRM system, such as Director of Research, Head of Research, and Associate Dean of Research, and a total of 44 responses were received from across the diverse membership of 120 Chartered ABS member schools. The questionnaire included the following topics:

Lead research role objectives and person specification

- Title of the lead research role
- Key elements of the role
- Most important pre-requisites/attributes/skills for the role holder
- Key objectives for the role

Lead research role arrangements

- Process of appointment
- Salary enhancement
- Workload allocation
- Length of tenure
- Sabbatical period

Remit of lead research role

- Membership of committees outside of the business school
- Defined duties of the role
- Research impact

Prior leadership roles

- Leadership roles occupied prior to senior research role

Training and role resources

- Training offered
- Allocation of research assistant resources
- Annual discretionary expenditure/principal areas of expenditure within the remit of the role

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- Gender
- Disability status
- Ethnicity

FINDINGS

Lead research role objectives and person specification

Table 1. 'What is your job title?'

Role title - category	% of total respondents
Associate Dean – Research	25%
Director of Research	20%
Professor and Director of Research/Head of Research/ Deputy Dean (Research)	14%
Professor	11%
Deputy Dean (Research)	7%
Others	23%
Total	**100%**

The respondents' job titles were placed into broad categories as displayed in table 1. Nearly half of the respondents had either the Associate Dean – Research or Director of Research titles. An additional 14% had the title of Professor combined with a senior research title, and a further 11% simply had the Professor title but without any designation for senior research leader. Of those in the 'others' category, these included titles such as Head of School, Research Manager, and those related to research engagement and impact.

Figure 1: Key elements of lead research roles in UK business schools
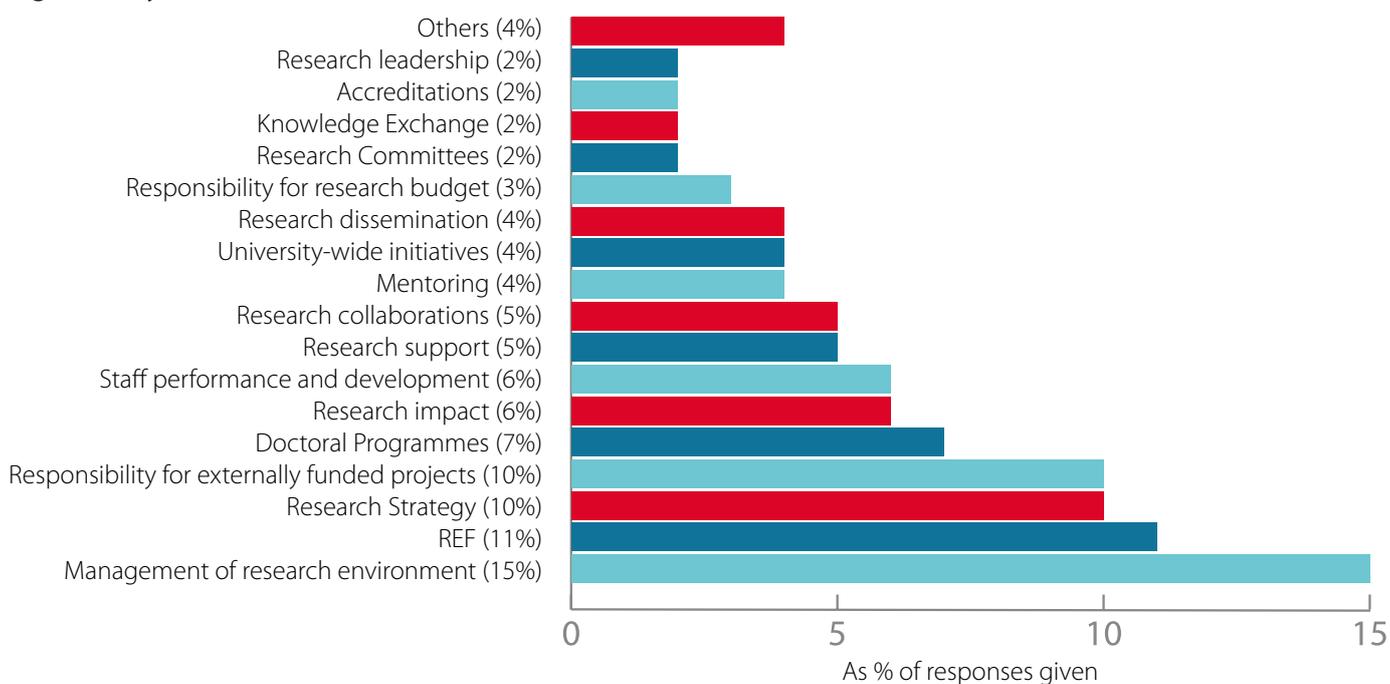
The survey asked respondents to state up to five key elements of the lead research role in their business school. The overall management of the research environment and culture was the most frequently cited duty, followed by other overarching duties such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF), and research strategy. Other elements that were frequently mentioned were responsibility for externally funded projects, management

of doctoral programmes, research impact, and staff performance and development. Despite the growing importance of Knowledge Exchange and the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF), this was less frequently cited as a key area by the respondents.

Table 2. 'What are regarded as the most important prerequisites/attributes/skills for an individual occupying this role'?

Response Category	Response	Count
Research reputation	Proven research track record	25
	Reputation	12
	Track record in research income	3
	Professorship	2
	Count of total responses in category	**42**
Research skills/experience	Research Experience	8
	Knowledge of how to improve research environment	5
	REF experience	4
	Understanding of impact	4
	Research capabilities	4
	Research supervision experience	2
	Doctoral programmes experience	1
	Interdisciplinary expertise	1
	Count of total responses in category	**29**
Leadership & Strategic Vision	Leadership skills	12
	Sense of purpose/vision	9
	Understanding of external research environment	8
	Count of total responses in category	**29**
Management skills/experience	Inter-personal skills	10
	Management experience	10
	Stakeholder management	5
	Count of total responses in category	**25**
Soft skills	Team working skills	6
	Communication skills	5
	Administrative skills	2
	Organisation skills	1
	Creativity	1
	Attention to detail	1
	Resilience	1
	Count of total responses in category	**17**
Others	Networks	1
	Knowledge of institution	1
	Experience with engagement	1
	Commitment to institution	1
	Count of total responses in category	**4**

The various pre-requisites and attributes cited by respondents as being important for an individual to hold the senior research role were grouped into broader categories as shown in table 2. An individual's research reputation was the most cited pre-requisite, particularly in relation to a proven research track record and overall reputation in academic research. Attributes within the Research skills/experience category are joint second in terms of frequency with which they were mentioned, and these covered a broad range of attributes, including general research experience, understanding of how to improve the research environment, experience in the REF, and overall research capabilities. Pre-requisites related to Leadership & Vision were also frequently cited as being important, as individuals occupying the lead research role must be capable leaders, with a vision for their institution's research culture and strategy which is informed by the external environment.
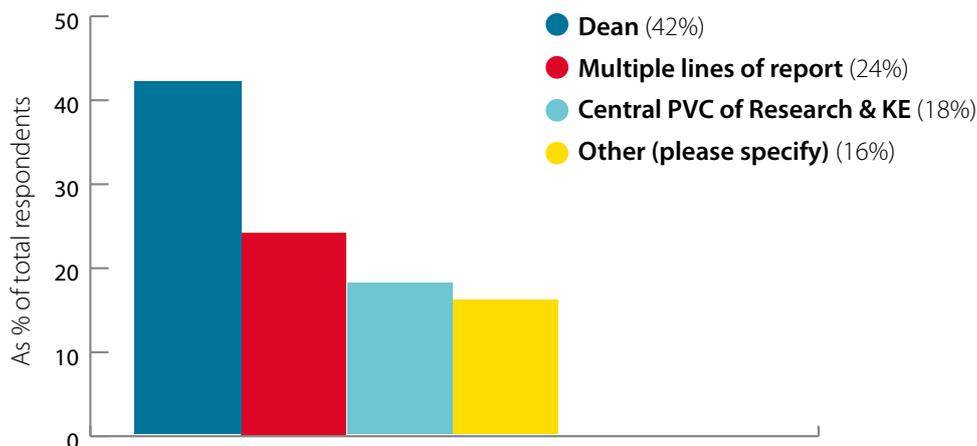
Attributes in the area of Management Skills/Experience were cited as important, namely the ability to foster effective working relations with others, strong experience in managing others, and the ability to manage a variety of different internal and external stakeholders. A range of soft skills were viewed as being important pre-requisites, particularly team-working and communication skills. Within the 'Others' category, it is worth noting that commitment to the respective institution and being knowledgeable about it were cited as important attributes.

Figure 2:   Word Cloud of responses to question 'What are the key objectives for your role?'

The Word Cloud reveals that the principal objectives of the senior research role in UK business schools are to increase research income, improve research output, develop/implement research strategy, and foster a research culture. Other frequently cited objectives are developing research capacity, improving REF performance, enhancing doctoral programmes, and meeting research KPIs. Linked to the objective of building research capacity are the aims of developing Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and recruiting high quality PhD students, which were both mentioned as important by multiple respondents.

> Attributes in the area of Management Skills/Experience were cited as important, namely the ability to foster effective working relations with others, strong experience in managing others, and the ability to manage a variety of different internal and external stakeholders.

Figure 3: 'Who sets the key objectives for your role (senior research role)?'

Legend:
- **Dean** (42%)
- **Multiple lines of report** (24%)
- **Central PVC of Research & KE** (18%)
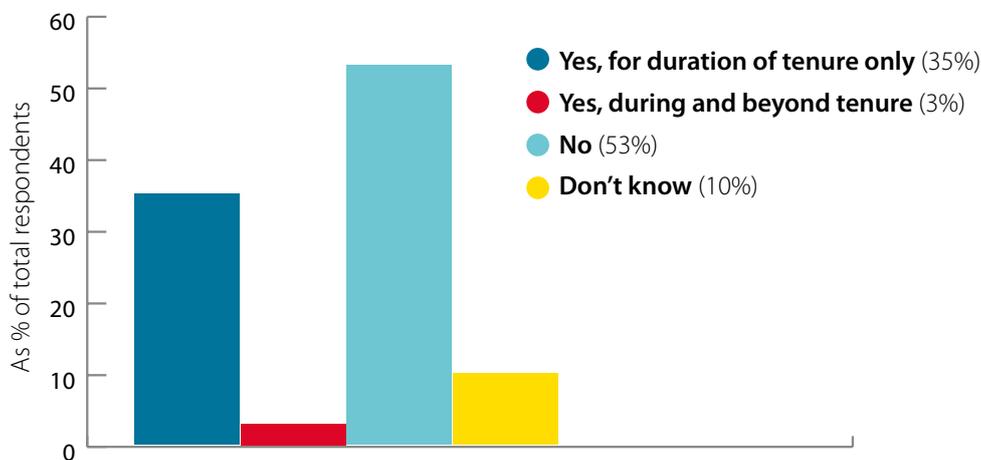- **Other (please specify)** (16%)

y-axis: As % of total respondents

The Dean is the most likely individual to set the key objectives for the senior research role, with 42% of respondents stating this was the case at their school. This is likely to reflect the fact that most senior research leaders report directly to the Dean of their business school. There is some variation in these results with one-quarter of respondents stating that the key objectives were set by multiple colleagues who they report to, and one-fifth reporting that the objectives were set by the Central Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Research & Knowledge Exchange. Of the responses in the 'other' category, these include the senior research leader setting the objectives for the role themselves, and the objectives being set by a combination of the Dean and a Pro-Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

Lead research role arrangements

Process of appointment to the lead research role

The most common means for appointment to the senior research role is via an interview, which is usually with the Dean, although the responses do not reveal if additional members of staff also attend the interview. Most of the responses do not reveal if the senior research lead was selected for interview via a formal application process or not. Around one-fifth of respondents stated they were appointed informally. Of those who were appointed via a formal application process, the comments do not indicate if these vacancies were advertised both internally and externally, but there are more comments about internal appointments than external, suggesting that internal appointments tend to be more common for the senior research role in UK business schools.

Figure 4: 'Does the lead role attract a salary enhancement?'

Legend:
- **Yes, for duration of tenure only** (35%)
- **Yes, during and beyond tenure** (3%)
- **No** (53%)
- **Don't know** (10%)

y-axis: As % of total respondents

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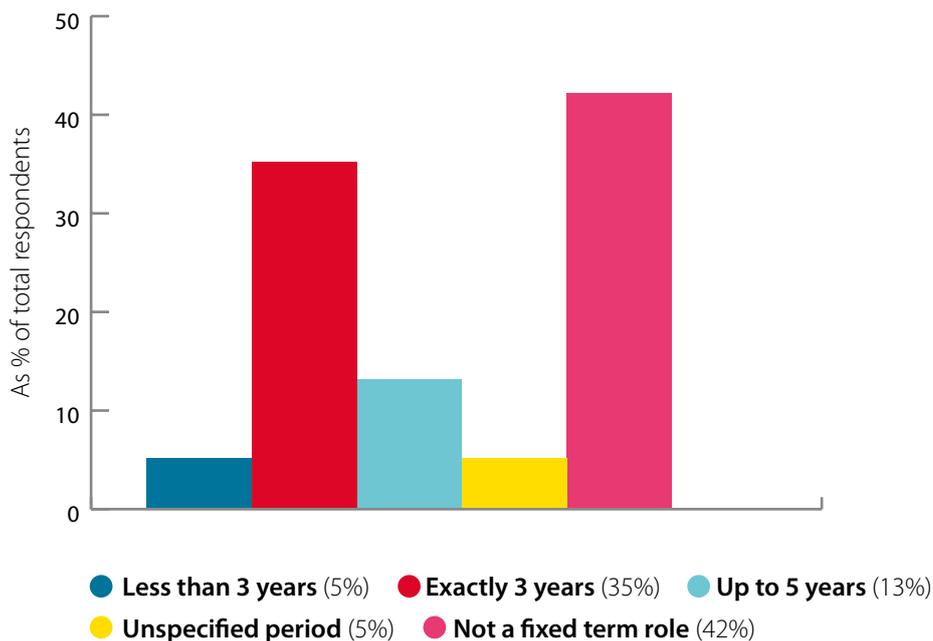
Less than half of the respondents reported that the lead research role attracted a salary enhancement, and in most cases this was for the duration of the tenure only.

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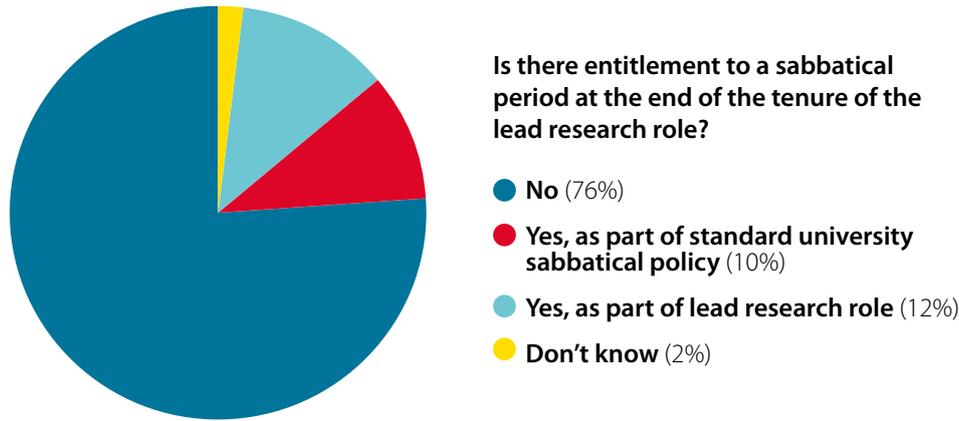**Percentage of workload allocated to the lead research role**

The average percentage of workload allocated to the lead research role is 47% and responses ranged from as low as 10% to as high as 100%. There were several comments that the actual workload percentage dedicated to the role was substantially higher than the official allocation (e.g. 90% in reality when the allocation was 50%) which left little time for duties outside of the direct responsibilities of the role such as teaching, research supervision, or personal research projects.

Figure 5: Duration and tenure of the lead research role

● **Less than 3 years** (5%)   ● **Exactly 3 years** (35%)   ● **Up to 5 years** (13%)
● **Unspecified period** (5%)   ● **Not a fixed term role** (42%)

Respondents were asked if the tenure for the lead research role was normally fixed-term and, if so, the duration. Just over half stated that the role was fixed-term with the most typical duration being three years (reported by 35%), but a duration of four or five years is not uncommon (13%). Several of those roles with a three-year term come with the option to extend for an additional three years or sometimes an additional year. A minority said that the period was unspecified and in one case this is due to the lead research role being performed as an informal duty alongside the individual's regular role rather than as a specifically defined lead role. A sizeable minority (42%) stated that in their school the lead research role did not have a fixed-term.

Figure 6: Entitlement to a sabbatical period for the lead research role

Is there entitlement to a sabbatical period at the end of the tenure of the lead research role?

● **No** (76%)

● **Yes, as part of standard university sabbatical policy** (10%)

● **Yes, as part of lead research role** (12%)

● **Don't know** (2%)

The majority of those responding to the survey stated that the lead research role at their school did not come with an entitlement to a sabbatical period at the end of the tenure. Around one-fifth reported that there was such an entitlement, of which half stated that the entitlement was part of the standard university sabbatical policy and the other half reporting that the entitlement was associated specifically with the lead research role.

Remit of lead research role

Table 3. 'Does the lead research role involve membership of committees beyond the immediate school? Please give details'.

Faculty-level committees	University-level committees	Other types of committees (location not stated)
Research	Research	European Research Committee
Research Learning Group	Research & Innovation	Grant Awarding Bodies
Research Advisory Group	Postgraduate research	Research Planning
Management Committee	Research & Knowledge Exchange	Knowledge Exchange
Research & Impact	REF	Academic Support Group
Executive Committee	Ethics	Academic Board
Faculty Board	Research Learning Group	
Associate Dean Group	Research & Impact	
Ethics	Directors of Research	
Research Leads	Social Sciences Research Group	
Learning & Teaching	Student Voice Group	
Research & Knowledge Transfer	Research Leaders Group	
Promotion panel	Senior Management/ Leadership team	
Scholarship	Professorial Promotions	
	Research Management	
	Academic Standards & Excellence	
	Impact Panels	
	External Funding	
	SDG Working Group	
	Seedcorn Fund	
	Senate	

As would be expected, committees related to research, impact, and knowledge exchange most typically involve membership of the lead research role. Other committees on which the lead research role often serves include ethics, promotions, scholarships, and research funding. Some of those who completed the survey also sit on senior committees at faculty or university-level, such as the Associate Dean Group or Executive Committee.

Figure 7: Defined duties of the lead research role

As % of total respondents
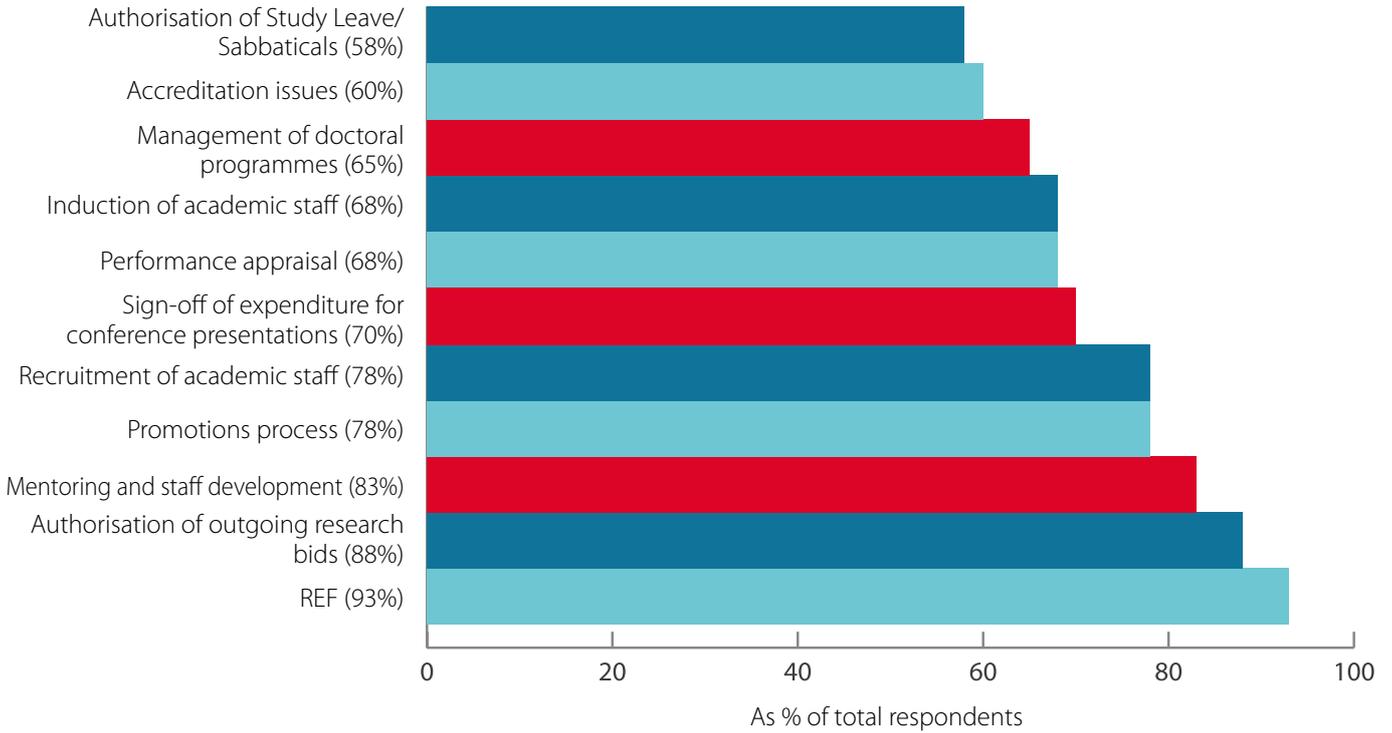
Approximately nine out of ten of those who completed the survey reported that the lead research role in their school had the REF as a defined duty, and around the same proportion reported authorisation of outgoing research bids as a defined duty. Over three-quarters stated that mentoring and staff development, promotions, and recruitment were defined duties of the most senior research role. Authorisation of study leave/sabbaticals, accreditation issues, and management of doctoral programmes were less frequently selected from the list of possible duties, but were still cited as defined duties by more than half of the respondents.

The defined duties correspond closely to the key elements of the lead research role cited by respondents in figure 1, (see page 4), with the REF, authorisation of outgoing research bids, and mentoring and staff development resembling the most frequently mentioned key elements which were the management of the research environment, REF, research strategy, and responsibility for externally funded projects.

Figure 8: Is research impact covered within the remit of the lead research role?

Is research impact covered within the remit of the lead research role?

● **Yes** (91%)

● **No** (3%)

● **Don't know** (3%)

● **Other (please specify)** (3%)
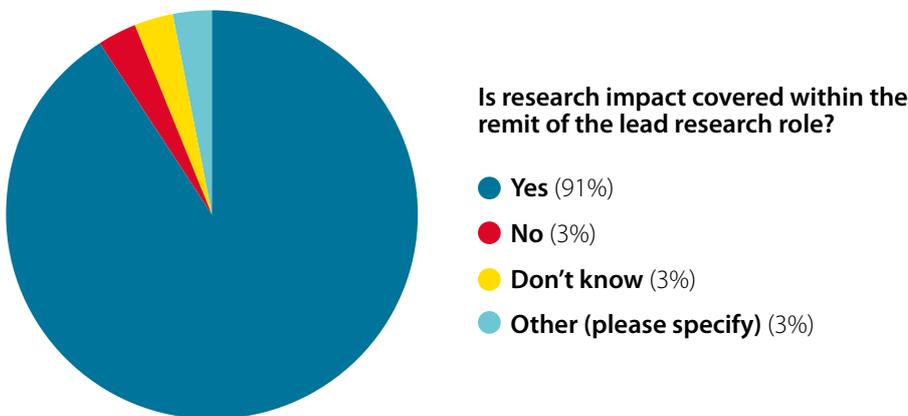
The vast majority of those who completed the survey reported that research impact was covered within the remit of the most senior research role. This is supported by other data gathered by the survey which shows that a significant number of job titles for the lead research role include the word impact.

Prior leadership roles

Figure 9: Word Cloud of responses to question 'List any leadership roles you have occupied prior to your current position'

The Word Cloud at figure 9 gives an indication of the typical leadership roles occupied prior to assuming the lead research role. Those in larger font size were more frequently cited, such as Head of PhD, Head of Research Centre/Department, Associate Dean, Subject Group Leader, and Director of MBA.

Training and role resources

Table 4. 'What training is offered by your institution for your role?'

Response	Count
Chartered ABS/BAM Development Programme for Directors of Research (DPDoR)	16
None offered	8
Combination of in-house and external training	6
Training in specific areas	4
In-house training	4
Access to development networks	1
Mentoring programme	1

The overall impression from the answers received is that there is a wide variation in the training opportunities offered by business schools for the lead research role and the scope to make suggestions. As shown in table 4, the Chartered ABS/BAM Development Programme for Directors of Research (DPDoR) was the most frequently cited form of training that institutions offered to their senior research lead or encouraged them to take up. There were a significant number of comments that no specific training was offered at all and that there was a prior expectation that the person occupying the lead research role would already have the required skills and knowledge. Both in-house and external training opportunities were available in some schools, covering management and leadership training, career coaching, institutional policy, EDI, and REF. The AdvanceHE Aurora programme for women aspiring to leadership positions was also encouraged at one of the institutions, and another operated a university-wide leadership development network.

Is there any allocation of research assistant/research associate resource during tenure of the lead research role?

Few of the respondents reported that there was any allocation of a research assistant or similar resource for the lead research role, although some receive assistance in administrative matters related to research. In some cases a research assistant was only available if there was a research grant providing for one. In some schools there is an internal funding allocation for research assistance that can be drawn upon from the business school or wider university if needed, but these seem to be in the minority.

What level of annual discretionary expenditure does the lead research role have?

The average amount of discretionary expenditure for the lead research role across the respondents' institutions was £310,000, with a low of £20,000 and a high of £1m, although it should be noted that there may have been varying interpretations of the meaning of discretionary. Budget for conferences was comfortably the most common area of expenditure under the remit of a Director of Research or similar role (see table 5), and responsibility for other forms of staff costs (excluding salaries) was also common, such as training and travel costs. One of the institutions has a conference budget dedicated specifically to supporting ECRs.

Many of the lead research roles have responsibility for a research budget, in some cases inviting internal applications for seed corn funding to 'pump-prime research' to develop ideas with potential for larger, possibly external grant applications, and allocations for doctoral programmes or research centres. Responsibility for QR funding is also common, and at one of the responding schools this is subject to overall approval by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor with the Director of Research reviewing and approving the grant applications.

Table 5. 'What are the principal areas of expenditure under the control of the lead research role?'

Response	Count
Conferences	25
Internal research awards	14
Staff training & development	12
Seed Corn funding/pump-priming staff research	11
Doctoral programmes	9
Journal submission fees	6
QR funds	4
Organising events	3
Proof reading	3
External engagement	3
Administrative support	2
Personal development allowance	2
Travel	2
Research Support	2
Impact funding	2
Overheads	2
Strategic investments	2
Business development	1
External networking	1

Appendix - EDI characteristics of respondents
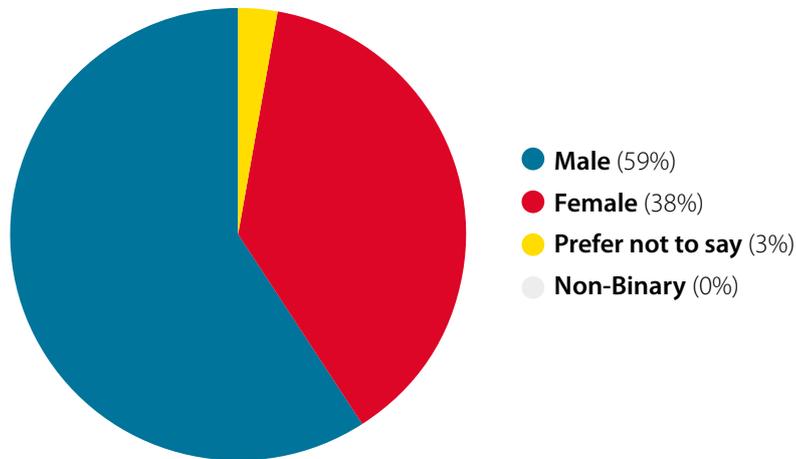
Figure 10: Gender of survey respondents

- ● **Male** (59%)
- ● **Female** (38%)
- ● **Prefer not to say** (3%)
- ● **Non-Binary** (0%)

Figure 11: Disability status of survey respondents

'Do you have a disability?'

- ● **No** (92%)
- ● **Yes** (5%)
- ● **Prefer not to say** (3%)

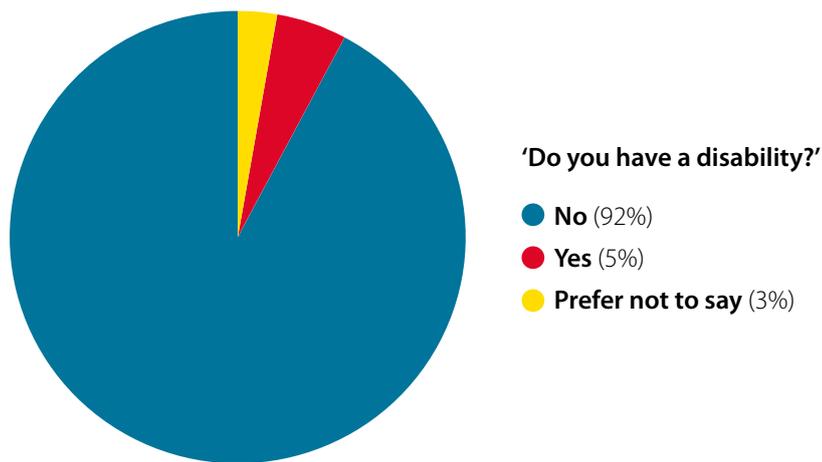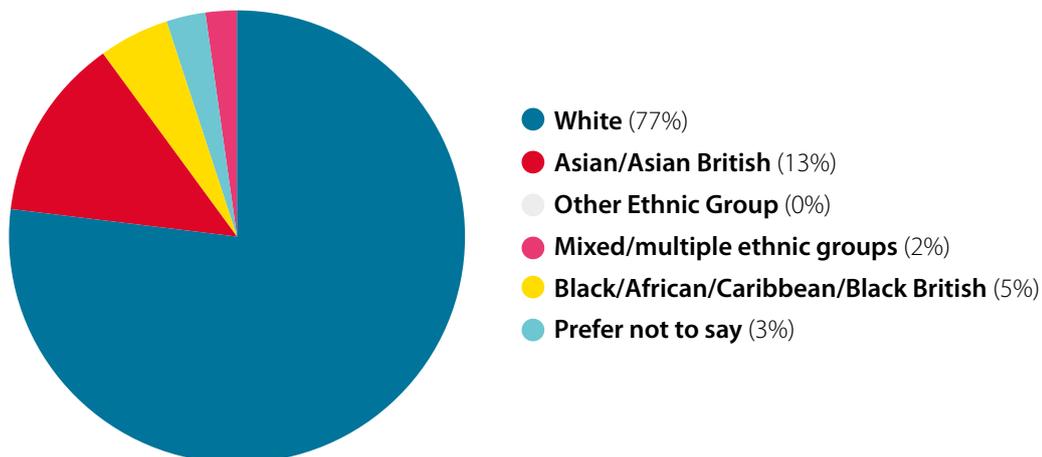**Figure 12: Responses to question 'Please select the category which most accurately describes your ethnic group or background'**

- ● **White** (77%)
- ● **Asian/Asian British** (13%)
- ● **Other Ethnic Group** (0%)
- ● **Mixed/multiple ethnic groups** (2%)
- ● **Black/African/Caribbean/Black British** (5%)
- ● **Prefer not to say** (3%)