Educational researchers are a disparate interdisciplinary group, often scattered across different Schools in a university and split between policy-based and pedagogic researchers and further fragmented through specialisation. There are many sub-disciplinary areas in the educational researcher community, illustrated by the British Educational Research Association having 37 different Special Interest Groups, including one for each academic discipline.

At the University of Hertfordshire we have educational researchers focusing on higher education and other phases of education, development of professional identity, language development, leadership, learning and pedagogy, partnership, policy, subject specific pedagogy in line with their own discipline, student experience, system-level impact, and the use of technology.

The educational researcher community is spread across all Schools at the University. It is growing in strength and recognition, and is well served by the Educational Research Network, launched in 2018. This research project was conducted to develop our understanding of this diverse community: the motivation and engagement of colleagues; resources and support that helped them; perceptions they have of their current research skills and those they would like to develop further; and resources and support that they would value.
The data were collected from self-identified educational researchers employed across several Schools. More than 32 participated – probably about a third of the educational researcher population. Data were collected at an Educational Research Network meeting and at a School of Education Conference in June 2019, as well as from staff contacted through the mailing lists of both these groups.

Comments were collected anonymously on post-it notes and collated together with the responses received directly by email. Some identifiers were deleted and minimal editing carried out, if considered appropriate.

These are the themes arising from thematic analysis of the data.
Motivational and supportive factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivational and supportive factors</th>
<th>Intellectual challenge (sometimes through research degree)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Link between research and work</td>
<td>Modelling good practice, developing research culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>(sometimes inextricable)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deepen subject knowledge in field</td>
<td>Interest, passion and curiosity</td>
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<tr>
<td>of interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhance practice in field of interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learn about how to do research</td>
<td>Desire to have an impact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raise academic profile</td>
<td>Conferences &amp; travel</td>
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The full set of results is available in the accompanying report. Here is a sample of the results.

Within the theme of motivational and supportive factors there were comments related to researching **the what?** of teaching, i.e. to develop subject knowledge and understanding related to the teaching specialism; and to researching **the how?** of teaching, i.e. to develop pedagogical approaches including supporting students’ research and developing learning tools for colleagues and students.
Enjoyable aspects of carrying out research that were referred to most often were gathering participants’ views, and collecting data, which in many cases are synonymous in qualitative research. This gives the researchers the opportunity to interact with the participants and to hear their experiences and opinions.

There was an overlap between motivational and enjoyable factors, which was not surprising.

The predominant source of support cited is the opportunity to discuss research with colleagues, others who are engaged in research and fellow students. Several participants commented that being in a research team with experienced researchers had been a good learning experience for them.

Participants within the group identified a range of specific developmental needs and reported many research strengths.
These educational researchers had a diverse range of research interests. They came from many different perspectives, with different understandings of educational research, which reflects the breadth of the field. Groups of researchers are small and often niche; individual researchers might work in isolation and outside of the School of Education. All these factors challenge our capacity to provide for researcher development effectively. The findings illustrate the challenge of linking people with strengths to those identifying a matched need, for peer support and mentoring within the community of educational researchers.

Mentoring is usually within Schools, while educational research and expertise in this field lies in several Schools, so that managers need to encourage cross-University educational research and research mentoring if the outcomes and benefits of these processes are to have an impact on the University as a whole. There is also a need for signposting to the more generic researcher development opportunities which is provided in the institutional Researcher Development Programme.

The Educational Research Network provides a good place to bring educational researchers from across the University together. The findings from this research project have been disseminated there, helping us to develop a shared understanding of ourselves, provoking a deeper discussion about how we can work more effectively in our context and surfacing a significant desire to make interdisciplinary connections at ‘grass root’ level on common areas of interest in order to develop recognised research groups, and to attract funding. In this way, we hope that this small project will be a helpful lever towards institutional change, supporting the building of research groups to conduct collaborative research projects.
Researcher Development Concordat

Environment & Culture:
Maintaining a supportive and inclusive research culture where researchers and their managers can engage with opportunities to contribute to policy development aimed at creating a more positive research environment and culture within their institution.

Professional Development:
Taking ownership of career, identifying opportunities to work towards career goals, maintaining an up-to-date professional career development plan and building a portfolio of evidence demonstrating experience.

Through disseminating the findings in the wider University, we may provoke a discourse for better understanding of the needs of researchers in different disciplines. As the research has been carried out at practitioner level, by a peer, the results may provide different insights from those collected by national surveys. In this way researchers have had an opportunity to contribute towards a more positive research environment and culture, as promoted by the new Researcher Development Concordat.

The research surfaces the need to appreciate how educational researchers identify themselves, and the implications that has for their development. It might be possible for educational researchers to find a group of like-minded researchers in a similar area, but equally, there may be a need to look externally, to other specialised groups of educational researchers. This is important for researcher mentors and developers to appreciate, because of the limitations in providing for the needs of all educational researchers internally.

I would be interested in hearing how you provide for specific groups of researchers in your institutions, especially educational researchers. Please send any comments or questions to me, Elizabeth White at e.j.white@herts.ac.uk. Thank you.