

Feedback from the Pulse Focus Groups October and November 2017

1. Background

The recent staff Pulse survey (June 2017) highlighted employee concerns about development and career progression. The aim of running the focus groups which took place in October and November 2017 was to assess where the institution was with regards to development and career progression i.e. how Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and staff development are being managed and supported. Also to explore what St George's could do better to support and enable career progression for staff.

Staff were asked to share their views through responding to a series of six questions covering the following topics:

- What is the St George's does well in relation to staff development and CPD
- Barriers to accessing staff development and CPD
- What could St George's do better to support staff development and CPD
- Barriers to career progression at St George's
- Approaches to support career progression and development at St George's

Teaching, research and professional services staff attended the focus groups and participants came from a range of levels in the university structure.

Table 1

Staff attendance by professional area and type of contract	
Professional Services - permanent	56%
Professional Services - contract	6%
Academic – Research/Education permanent	22%
Academic – Research/Education contract	8%
No indication of role or contract	8%

Table 2

Staff attendance by gender	
Female staff	72%
Male staff	28%

The structure of the focus group questions allowed staff to be reflective and their responses offered insight into their experiences alongside suggestions for improvement. Feedback has been recorded in an anonymous way which aims to inform recommendations for future staff development and organisational development initiatives.

2. What St George's does well in relation to staff development and CPD

Staff identified a wide range of positive practice from across the university relating to staff development and CPD. They indicated there was good general provision for staff training offered centrally with support departmentally from managers to attend workshops on these courses or programmes, including the promotion and benefits of the monthly IT training offer.

Some professional service areas identified training needs and had budgets in place to facilitate staff accessing external courses and conferences. Some managers highlighted they had autonomy to support attendance to relevant external courses and conferences and positively supported studying for professional qualifications.

The regular internal seminar offer, educational seminars and teacher development were highlighted as highly visible and valuable. Whilst the offer is beneficial sometimes these were not relevant to all staff roles. The quality of training for research degree supervision and PhD supervisors was praised as were the training courses offered focusing on specific scientific areas. Training and support for MSc/PhD development supporting staff to fulfil their role at the university was also recognised as good.

It was noted that institutes support staff at all levels to attend conferences whereas other staff challenged this by saying there was limited funding for academic courses/conferences externally, indicating some inconsistency in practice across the organisation. Some male staff commented that some development opportunities are accessible by females only.

Access to programmes such as the Future Leaders programme and the Aurora Leadership programme were highlighted as positive and staff felt these strongly supported their leadership and management development needs. Though it was acknowledged by staff that more support should be in place for those transitioning into new line management roles.

Academic promotions were acknowledged as having clear guidelines and events to facilitate and enable the process.

3. Key Themes

A summary of the responses and recommendation forms the body of this report and these are divided into the following themes:

- Fair, consistent and transparent access to staff development/CPD
- Quality and effectiveness of Personal Reviews
- Breadth, relevance and visibility of overall staff development offer
- Support for career planning and progression

3.1 Fair, consistent and transparent access to staff development/CPD

Staff are looking for a clearer and more inclusive message from the university in relation to the value, investment, time and permissions to have access to relevant staff development and CPD linked to job role, skills and competencies, career progression and organisational need. Staff felt strongly that the current system benefits staff who are proactive. Some staff were also unclear as to their eligibility to apply for particular training courses or programmes in relation to their grade. Staff also commented there was a lack of postdoctoral development.

Access to staff development/CPD opportunities have at times been affected by budgetary constraints. The majority of staff are dependent on their own department/institutes' devolved training budgets. Where the university is not able to support training internally the need for external training comes at a cost, which is not

always fundable. Lack of time due to current work commitments and workload was indicated as another key barrier.

Staff would like clarity from the university about what is funded centrally and options to support professional up-skilling and business critical skills for now and in the future. They are also looking for clarity from all departments/institutes about what they are able to fund demonstrating inclusion and parity across the institution.

3.2 Quality and effectiveness of Personal Reviews

Staff commented that the quality of Personal Reviews (PRs) and one to ones were variable. They felt that line managers were not always flagging development needs or opportunities and that with some staff the research focus could override career conversations as part of this process. The mixed quality of PRs was consistently raised including the confidence and consistency of line managers to have open and honest conversations regarding career development, supporting staff's aspirations to progress. Staff felt there was lack of clarity in signposting and discussing career development as part of this annual process and they felt there was a need for more regular career development conversations where and when these were necessary. They also felt that too often the PR was used as a tick box exercise and not adding value for staff or the organisation. In some cases the reviewer did not know staff's job role and therefore was not clear around staffs' skillset above and beyond their role. Staff also wanted the opportunity to have more ongoing performance, development and career progression conversations beyond the annual PR conversation.

3.3 Breadth, relevance and visibility of overall staff development offer

Staff highlighted that other universities provide a core programme of training and that St George's should look to reviewing its central offer to ensure it is aligned to organisational and business need and the specialist needs of current and future roles.

Staff suggested the following would additionally improve planning for, prioritising and access to staff development and CPD:

- For departmental priorities linked to a departmental training needs outlined and made transparent to all staff; Staff also want to make suggestions and offer input into departmental training needs;
- Clarity around shared responsibility through one to ones and the PR process encouraging and supporting staff to be proactive in planning their development and CPD;
- For the university to actively provide, signpost and promote appropriate and timely staff development opportunities through its central development offer;
- A focused central provision, with a core open programme, more centrally run courses, including core business skills, leadership and management skills, softer skills and core academic skills.

3.4 Support for career planning and progression

Staff were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with the career progression opportunities at St George's using a scale of 1 – 10. 10/10 being very satisfied and 1/10 being very unsatisfied. Their scores are collated below.

Table 3

6/10 and above	38%
5/10 and below	47%
No scaling indicated	15%
Median score was 5/10	

There was a general feeling there was a lack of opportunity to progress within St George's, more so in the professional services areas than in academic roles where the academic promotion progression routes and processes are clearer. Workload for academics including teaching hours and managing research work impacts on being able to focus on career planning and progression.

Organisationally clearer career and talent management guidance would be welcomed. Including more advice and information held centrally around career pathways and career progression both internally and externally to the organisation.

Fixed term contacts impact on staff's ability to progress and there is an understanding that for Early Career Researchers (ECR) this uncertainty is a common challenge in the HE sector.

Also highlighted was the fact that internal skillsets are not always shared proactively and staff are very protective of knowledge that they hold in their job roles. Limited opportunities to work-shadow or act up mean that staff often find it hard to identify skills gaps or to gain pertinent experience when looking to move to roles to the next grade. As a small organisation movement is dependent on roles being vacant and these are limited leading to talent drain in some areas.

Staff suggested the following to support career progression at St George's:

- The need for a career development section on the portal aligned to staff development. Mapping for roles for both academic and professional services, demonstrating career pathways and with role expectations and development options;
- Clear signposting from university on how career progression/role transition/promotion is supported;
- Development linked to career progression possibilities to enable better career planning;
- Quality and advocacy of career development and support as an integral part of the PR process;
- Mentoring for career progression supporting staff to access information, advice and guidance for professional next steps e.g. use of internal expertise to support post doc development to springboard their career;
- Sharing of expertise across St George's. Ensuring the institution acknowledges the need to share internal staff expertise. Working to ensure sharing best practice becomes an institution wide practice supporting work shadowing, peer mentoring and coaching.

3.5 Further areas to explore

Staff also identified wider issues relating to a lack of consistency and opportunities for employee recognition. Staff also recognised the need for further development of St George's values and behaviours. Both these areas are already planned HR work streams for 2018.

4. Recommendations

Therefore the following actions are proposed to improve staff development/CPD and career progression at St George's:

- Review the alignment of the central staff development offer and bespoke training with the delivery of St George's strategic and operational plan; enabling staff to meet the requirements and expectations of the faculty/department/operational plans and to make a full contribution to the work of their faculty/department/service;
- All departments to conduct an annual training needs analysis (TNA) and budget for these identified training needs;
- Widen the scope and breadth of the staff development offer (subject to funding and priorities);
- Review the distribution of funding for training opportunities across the organisation to ensure greater fairness;
- Review and implement new people management and leadership development programmes in line with strategic aims and to support at all levels in the organisation;
- Ensure clear signposting of departmental and central training through better communications;
- Review the Personal Review process (PR). Clarify and update PR expectations of reviewer and reviewee to include career development and progression conversations within and outside of this process;
- Ensure a clear alignment of the academic promotions and PR process;
- Build the skills and confidence of line managers to have career conversations to support direct reports, including the development of career coaching and mentoring skills;
- Make sure staff know about progression opportunities open to them. Identify internal talent in the organisation and provide opportunities to support applications for promotions. Provide advice and guidance to staff regarding what they need to do to develop and be eligible for progression;
- Develop a range of centralised resources to support and signpost career planning and development for staff;
- Provide information on career pathways in HE for staff based on their skills, experience, and length of service;
- Provide greater support to staff at key career transition points and identify development to support this;
- Offer support to staff prior to job transition e.g. early career researcher support, grant writing, job shadowing, mentoring; stepping into management;
- Increase opportunities to support staff who would like to take alternative paths to develop e.g. lateral moves, project work, job shadowing, secondments. Not all staff want upward progression they want to their grow knowledge, expertise and skills.



Many of these recommendations are subject to the availability of funding and therefore will be considered as part of the planning round for 2018/19.

5. Conclusion

Whilst there are some positive strengths about our approach in these areas it is clear that further investment needs to be made toward staff development at a departmental and central level. More structure, support and accountability for development and career progression needs to be incorporated into the PR process from key stakeholders. There needs to be more signposting, support and resources centrally for career planning and professional development.

Staff saw the Pulse focus groups as positive step that St George's is encouraging the employee voice. These sessions allowed the staff to express their views and concerns. Their recommendations on how to improve future planning will enable the university to better meet the requirements of the University's strategic and operational plans and the needs of staff.