



HR Excellence in Research Award – Annual Report 2023

This report outlines the progress St George's, University of London has made in achieving its [Action Plan](#) for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, following its external eight-year review under the Concordat. The University was informed in February 2023 that it was successful in retaining the European Commission HR Excellence in Research Award at the eight-year external review point. The next review will be the 11-year review in July 2025.

St George's, University of London, established in 1733, is distinctive as the UK's only independent medical and healthcare Higher Education Institution, employing approximately 850 staff, of whom around a third are engaged within our research institutes or support research within our Research Operations group (eg technicians). St George's, University of London shares its main campus with St George's University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, one of the UK's largest teaching hospitals. St George's, University of London has three research institutes: Infection and Immunity (I&I); Molecular and Clinical Sciences (MCS); and Population Health (PHRI); and one educational institute: the Institute of Medical and Biomedical Education (IMBE). As part of our [Strategic Vision 2030](#) our research objectives are to:

- pursue a culture of research excellence based around collaboration, which rewards innovation and promotes equal opportunities;
- increase our research volume and income by 50% (compared to 2022);
- provide an outstanding environment in which to undertake research with integrated research support services and specialist facilities;
- develop our knowledge exchange activities to ensure that our research and knowledge has the greatest possible impact.

St George's, University of London aims to provide our research staff at all stages of their careers with development opportunities, skills and knowledge to succeed in their professional roles; alongside career development, advice and guidance to encourage them to transition to future roles within St George's, University of London, to other HEIs or related employment. This includes close working with St George's University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. When referring to Early Career Researchers (ECRs) we are mainly considering Post-docs, Research Assistants/Fellows, with a particular emphasis on researchers on fixed-term contracts, as well as Lecturers in the early stages of their career.

Section 1: How internal evaluation is undertaken

Monitoring of our Concordat action plan is undertaken by a Working Group including representatives from PhD students, the Postdoc forum, Human Resources, Joint Research and Enterprise Service (JRES), Research Technicians and academics. The Working Group consults with relevant stakeholders to determine progress with regard to the action plan and any further actions that may be required.

In addition, staff feedback, where available, feeds into the action plan, including via the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS), staff pulse surveys and through ECR representation on relevant committees.

The Working Group reports to Research and Enterprise Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise). Research and Enterprise Committee has responsibility for research strategy and operations and the Concordat self-assessment and action plan implementation. Research and Enterprise Committee oversee development of research staff, and has representation across the academic institutes, professional services, ECRs and PhD students. It is also responsible for overseeing central research funds, eg bridging funding. Research and Enterprise Committee reports to Executive Board, who in turn report to Council.

Many of the actions within the action plan dovetail with university wide actions which form part of the Institutional Athena SWAN Silver Award action plan 2017-2022 and the Race Equality Review action plan 2021. These action plans are led by the Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and supported by an Athena SWAN self-assessment team (SAT) and Race Equality Action and Engagement Group. The actions reflect our commitment to advancing gender and race equality. For actions that are tailored for research staff and students, Athena SWAN SAT work closely with the HREiR Working Group and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise) to ensure effective implementation and integrated support for researchers. The Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is also a member of the working group.

Section 2: Key achievements and progress against strategy and actions identified in St George's, University of London eight-year review action plan (May 2022- May 2025)

The current action plan reflects our commitment to developing researchers and commenced in May 2022, although many of the actions are ongoing initiatives. Progress has been made on a number of actions over the past year, as outlined below.

Environment and Culture

- The HREiR Working Group, is now led by the Deputy Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise) to ensure greater involvement from academics. New post-doc, lecturer and senior lecturer representatives, who successfully line-manage ECRs, have also been recruited to the working group, improving representation, input and feedback on the action plan.
- As part of our action to improve researcher engagement with the Concordat, the new Chair of the HREiR Working Group contacted all ECRs to inform them of the resources available and the work of the working group.
- St George's submission to renew its Athena SWAN award will be submitted in July 2023. The Concordat eight-year action plan is being taken into account by the Athena SWAN SAT as part of the submission. The SAT's membership includes members of the HREiR Working Group, including the Chair.
- A new learning management system was introduced in 2022 which hosts all of the University's online mandatory training modules (eg relating to health and safety, information security and diversity and inclusion). This has improved the ability to report on completion rates and managers have been encouraged to discuss mandatory training with researchers as part of the 2022/23 PDR round.

Employment

- A review of researchers on longer-term fixed term contracts is being undertaken by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise) and Research Institute Directors in

2023, with a view to offer permanency where possible.

- Workshops to support potential applicants for academic promotion were reviewed and are now delivered aimed at either the Research route to promotion or Education route. This enables researchers to attend the Research route workshop and ask questions specific to their academic concerns.
- Analysis of academic promotions over the past 5 years was undertaken in 2023. This demonstrated that, on average, applicants who declared themselves to be from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background took longer to be promoted than other applicants. Work to encourage applications from ethnic minority staff are being taken forward as part of the University's race equality action plan. Information on time to promotion was included in the 2023 academic promotions workshops to encourage academics to consider applying for promotion.
- The Directors of Research Institutes have been encouraged to increase their usage of the University's Fair Recruitment Specialist initiative, who are staff from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds who volunteer to sit on recruitment interview panels in order to address issues of underrepresentation in our recruitment activities.

Professional and Career Development

- New training has been commissioned in 2023 for researchers and their managers, including knowledge sharing from professional services departments on their roles and the support they can offer, training on how to write a grant application and additional leadership training. The latter includes 360 degree feedback and action learning sets.
- Guidance was provided to researchers and their managers on what Continuous Personal Development (CPD) includes (training, seminars, conferences, committee, public engagement and staff development). A spreadsheet was developed to help researchers think about what it might include for them. Encouragement to undertake at least 10 days CPD per year was reiterated, alongside the recommendation that CPD is discussed at PDR meetings.
- A coaching community of practice has been introduced to encourage best practice across the University of managers who have undertaken coaching training. This includes managers of ECRs.

Section 3: Next steps and the focus of St George's strategy for the next year (2023-2024), including success measures

Environment and Culture

- Further work is still required in 2023/24 to improve researcher awareness of the Concordat and Vitae resources. To this end, members of the working group monitoring the action plan will attend researcher team meetings over the coming year to improve awareness and understanding. Success will be measured through staff feedback, including via CEDARS.
- In addition, focus groups are planned in 2023/2024 with research staff, with a particular emphasis on career development. This will enable better targeting of development initiatives and will be measured through staff feedback, including via CEDARS.
- Additional mental health awareness training is being commissioned, including for researchers. Success will be measured by take-up of the training and staff feedback, including positivity over questions around work-life balance.
- Further development of the reporting capabilities of the learning management system will occur in 2023/2024 to provide more specific details on staff mandatory training completion rates. Success will be measured by improvements in mandatory training compliance by staff in Research Institutes.

Employment

- Additional work will be undertaken to encourage applications for academic promotion, especially amongst ethnic minority staff, and improve the pipeline for senior academics. Success will be measured through successful promotion applications.
- From 2023/24, HR will more actively engage with Research Institutes over fixed-term contracts and the possibility of offering permanency. Success will be measured by a reduced use of fixed-term contracts, although recognising that grant funding may necessitate the use of fixed-term appointments in some instances.

Professional and Career Development

- A new webpage is being developed in 2023/24, with a focus on the training and development opportunities available to ECRs. The webpage will collate internal and external training opportunities, advertised in one single place, alongside regular and targeted comms. Success will be measured through improved take-up of training activities and improved staff feedback, including via CEDARS.
- Funding is being sought for 2023/24 in order to increase the number of places on the Aurora Leadership Programme available to Researchers. Success will be measured by the number of researchers on the programme increasing, ideally from 2 to 5.
- From 2023/24, all new post-docs will be offered mentoring with an internal mentor. Success will be measured through increased mentoring partnerships and staff feedback, including via CEDARS.