

HR Excellence in Research Award St George's, University of London: 4 Year Internal Assessment Report May 2018

Introduction and Context

St. George's, University of London (SGUL) was awarded the HR Excellence in Research (HRERA) Award in 2013 and undertook an interim self-evaluation in 2015. Since that time, St George's has continued to actively support the Concordat principles through its people practices. The award forms part of a wider organisational commitment to investing in our people and fostering a culture where everyone can thrive. This can also be demonstrated through our Athena SWAN work, and we recognise the importance of the synergistic relationship between the two initiatives. This report summarises our progress on the action plan since November 2015 and highlights our commitments and priorities for the upcoming two years.

SGUL has been undergoing a period of significant transformation. Professor Jenny Higham was appointed as Principal in November 2015. A new leadership team was subsequently appointed and a five year [strategic plan \(2017-2022\)](#) launched in June 2017. The Research Strategy within the plan sets out a renewed focus on enhancing the research environment and facilitating excellence, with particular emphasis on developing our Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and other Research staff and maximising the potential of our research collaborations especially links with St George's University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

Internal Evaluation

Our process for internal evaluation has included the following:

- The HR Excellence in Research award is a standing agenda item on Research Strategy Committee (RSC) which meets bi-monthly, chaired by the Deputy Principal (Research). Attendees include the Principal, Research Institute Directors, Associate Dean - Career Development of Research staff, Director of HR and Organisational Development, Athena SWAN representative and ECRs.
- Research staff views were sought through the 2016 staff survey, and Pulse Surveys in 2017. A Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) 2017 and Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS) 2017 provided indicators of support and development requested by research staff and an insight into how they feel about their work.
- Open meetings with research staff and the Principal at a 'World café' event (attended by 60 researchers) in 2017 to inform and formulate the new Strategic and Operational plans 2017-2022.
- The Athena SWAN agenda has led to common themes being identified and actions developed.
- The Researcher Development Group conducted a gap analysis of the 2015-2017 action plan.
- The Research Deanery and Institute Management Teams periodically review the action plan to ensure effective implementation.

Key achievements and Progress

Significant progress has been made against the original action plan, particularly in enhancing learning and development (L&D), encouraging greater 'employee voice' and strengthening SGUL's approach to diversity and inclusion (D&I). The context of transformation at SGUL has resulted in new priorities, and therefore some actions from the original plan have been superseded. Where some of the particularly ambitious targets have not been met, these have been reviewed and modified to reflect a realistic yet aspirational position. Key achievements are set out below, and the full detail is available in the action plans, published on our website.

Principle 1 – Recruitment, Selection and Retention

- The Concordat's recommendations continue to be implemented and embedded within our people policies and practice, and are overseen by the RSC.

- A revised approach to resourcing matters was put in place with the implementation of the Resourcing Review Committee (RRC), the impact being more informed decision-making on recruitment and retention as well as a more proactive approach to issues such as policy on fixed term contracts.
- As part of our Athena SWAN work, we reviewed fixed term contracts by gender in 2017, and have since instigated actions to support research staff on fixed term contracts to develop their careers e.g. commissioning career coaching skills training for Principal Investigators to support their direct reports, training in successful grant writing and writing targeted papers.
- HR for Managers training has been launched (pilot of 40 staff) to ensure people managers are better skilled to support the recruitment, selection and retention of their staff.
- SGUL was awarded Wellcome Trust Institutional Strategic Support Funding in 2016 to support major change in our research environment and direction, specifically by enhancing cross-Institute and bipartite links with St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. This has led to the funding of 4 ECR posts in 2017 to support new Clinical Academic Groups formed between the University and Trust in Cardiology (2015) and in Neurosciences and Infection (2017) funding for pilot projects to pump prime larger grant applications.

Principle 2 – Recognition and Value

- The Academic Promotions framework has been revised to accurately reflect the organisation's strategic priorities while allowing for clearer routes to promotion for those who may fall outside of a more traditional education or research pathway e.g. those in clinical practice or who have developed in a field of technical expertise. The revised framework also includes a confidential process for consideration of career gaps due to family breaks, ill health or other reasons.
- A staff survey was run in April 2016 which showed that staff in research institutes had high levels of engagement (69% vs 60% for overall workforce). 86% of this group are proud to work for SGUL and 73% of these staff would recommend SGUL as a place to work.
- Focus groups were run in 2017 to capture employee views on staff development and career progression. The outcomes have led to an action plan including a review of the performance review process, enhancing people management training, refreshing our mentoring offer and developing centralised resources to support and signpost career planning and development.
- High levels of personal review completion have been achieved for research staff, exceeding target with 90% completed for 2016/2017. The Researcher Development Framework has been piloted within the process and will be evaluated alongside a wider review of the personal review system.
- The HR Bridging Fund supports individuals reaching the end of their fixed term contracts while awaiting the outcome to a grant application, staff awarded funds include: 4 researchers (2016), 8 researchers (2017) and 7 researchers (2018).
- SGUL's leadership development offer has included a Future Leaders programme, place on the Aurora leadership programme for women, as well as wider people management skills training. 11 out of 16 participants on Future Leaders programmes have been promoted since completing the programme.
- SGUL conducted an equal pay audit in 2017 and gender pay audit in 2018. Following these audits, a Pay Working group has been established to further analyse and understand the causes of the gap while identifying specific targeted actions to be undertaken.

Principles 3 & 4 – Support and Development

- SGUL has an extensive research events programme including the [Molecular and Clinical Sciences \(MCS\) Institute Showcase Day](#), [MCS Annual Symposium](#) (sessions chaired by postdocs), SGUL Annual [Research Day](#) (190 attendees in 2017, includes ECR lectures, the Thomas Young Prize Lecture by a Fellow of the Royal Society and a poster competition), and [Jenner Day](#) showcasing Infection and Immunity research.

SGUL holds Postdoctoral, PhD and MRes Study Days, weekly Research Institute Seminars, a careers event and the Spotlight on Science public engagement programme.

- An enhanced L&D programme was designed and launched in 2017 incorporating feedback from staff survey, CROS and PIRLS surveys. This includes project management, grant writing, management development, coaching and mentoring, Innovation and Impact Awards for research and enterprise and access to study loans of up to £5000. CROS results have shown a positive increase in how far research staff feel they have equal access to training and development opportunities and to attend conferences and external meetings (76.4% in 2015, 83% in 2017).
- Institute of Medical and Biomedical Education (IMBE) has continued to develop its programme for teaching and learning including the launch of a new CPD programme to complement the existing SHINE HEA-accredited CPD programme and post-graduate certificate in Healthcare and Biomedical Education.
- A 2 day ECR induction process was launched in 2017 with additional mentoring support and presentation skills training provided (17 ECRs took part).
- SGUL was jointly awarded 10 PhD studentships by MRC (with London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) resulting in a cohort support network and training for postgraduate students.
- [George's Academic Training \(GAT\)](#) was established in August 2016 to support and develop an integrated academic training programme the University and the Trust. Currently there are 26 funded clinical academic posts supported by the GAT programme.

Principle 5 - Researcher Responsibilities

- ECRs and other Researchers have been proactively recruited to key committees e.g. Senate (9 researchers), Research Strategy Committee (10 researchers), Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team (7 Researchers) and REF 2021 Steering Executive (9 researchers).
- SGUL endorses the *Concordat to Support Research Integrity*, which is promoted widely to staff to increase professional standards and ensure legal and ethical compliance. The Research Ethics Committee was established in 2015 and training has been provided to staff (80% positive feedback from participants).
- New internal communication initiatives have been launched since 2016 such as Townhalls, Meet the Principal Events, weekly VLogs whereby all staff are encouraged to participate and contribute.

Principle 6 – Diversity and Equality

- D&I is a key priority within the strategic plan. A new governance structure includes new D&I steering and working groups to ensure a strategic approach led by senior leaders and cross-organisational engagement. New positions recruited: Associate Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) role and D&I Manager.
- SGUL submitted an application for the Athena SWAN Silver Award in December 2017 (awaiting outcome) which sets out SGUL's commitment to gender equality and diversity. As part of this work, specific issues relating to contract researchers have been identified and actions developed.
- SGUL has continued to work towards other chartermarks, including Stonewall and Disability Confident.
- 90% of CROS 2017 respondents felt SGUL is committed to diversity and equality, compared with 88% in 2015.

Principle 7 – Implementation and Review

- The Postdoctoral Forum and Researcher Development Group (RDG) were formed to enable a mechanism for research staff to contribute and review SGUL's approach to the Concordat principles. Impact: 63% of CROS in 2017 felt they have opportunities to participate in decision-making processes (compared with 53% in 2015, and 45% in 2013).
- Engagement and awareness of the Concordat remains a priority for SGUL and a range of feedback and review mechanisms are in place for this purpose. This feedback is used to inform both research strategy as well as people strategy.

Section 4: Strategy for the next four years

Researcher development remains a key priority, and is embedded throughout our policies and practice. A new two year action plan has been developed, and an HR Excellence in Research Implementation Group is being established (replacing RDG) to ensure review and successful implementation of the plan. This group will guide researcher development strategy and policy and will report to the RSC.

Our research strategy over the next five years is to focus our research on areas where we have proven or emerging potential for excellence and global impact. We plan to enhance the research environment and facilitate excellence by:

1. Extending strategic collaboration with St George's University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and other institutions
2. Providing a research environment that inspires innovation and career fulfilment at all levels
3. Recognising, inspiring and retaining early career researchers to create scientific leaders of the future
4. Maximising the impact of our research and its contribution to scientific knowledge and clinical practice
5. Facilitating public engagement in research
6. Providing expert opinion at local, national and international levels to inform policy

Our wide-ranging partnerships in research and education provide opportunities for international exchange of research staff e.g. Global Health Centre, membership of the Bloomsbury Centre for Global Health, MRC doctoral training programme, and substantial global health funding from EU Horizon 2020, NIHR, Gates and other funders. In parallel, SGUL has educational links with Thomas Jefferson University, Marshall University and University of Nicosia. SGUL is expanding its collaborations with St George's University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust by bringing together academics and clinicians in Clinical Academic Groups to further its leading edge biomedical and health research in areas such as Cardiology, Population Health, Infection and Neurosciences.

While our new action plan details all our priorities, below are some of our key areas of focus:

1. Enhance our learning and development offer:
 - Delivery of a new, enhanced leadership development programme (Success measure: >8 participants on pilot, >70% satisfaction rate by 2019).
 - Reviewing the performance review approach to ensure the professional and personal development of staff (Success Measure: Staff Survey 2019 satisfaction rates with PRs >50%, CROS 2019 >70%).
2. Develop a culture that is diverse and inclusive where everyone can thrive:
 - Develop a forward plan for future chartermark submissions which considers wider areas of diversity.
 - Increase number of job share opportunities where operationally possible (Success measure: 5% increase in satisfaction of work life balance).
 - Implement our gender pay action plan committed to reducing the gap by a third by 2020.
3. Continue to increase the mechanisms for employee voice to ensure that the views of our researchers are listened to and can shape our strategy at SGUL:
 - We will use focus groups and world café events as a regular means to gather insights, and will conduct our next staff survey in 2019.
 - We will seek to increase the completion rates for CROS and PIRLS to ensure representation of researcher views (increase response rates in 2019 by at least 10%).

Our work will be underpinned by the Concordat principles and the RDF so that we can continue to build on the achievements made since SGUL achieved the HRER award in 2013. Further detail can be found in our HRER Action Plan 2018-2020 on our website.