



HR Excellence in Research Award – Annual Report 2021

Background

St George's, University of London is a signatory of [The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#), run by Vitae. As such, one of our responsibilities under the Concordat is to “Produce an annual report to their governing body or equivalent authority, which includes their strategic objectives, measures of success, implementation plan and progress, which subsequently is publicly available.”

In order to fulfil the above requirement, this report has been produced for Council for information. The report has been approved by Research Committee and outlines the progress St George's, University of London has made in achieving its [Action Plan](#) for the Concordat, following its internal six-year self-assessment under the Concordat. The university was informed in October 2020 that it was successful in retaining the European Commission HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiRA) at the six-year internal review point.

Our eight-year review is due on 7 July 2022. This report will therefore also contribute towards the eight-year self-assessment. The current action plan can be found on our website.

St George's, University of London is distinctive as the UK's only independent medical and healthcare Higher Education Institution, employing approximately 750 staff, of whom around 40% are engaged within our research institutes or support research (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; Molecular and Clinical Sciences; and Population Health; and one educational institute: the Institute of Medical and Biomedical Education.

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 liaises 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 a review of mentoring in 2018, a review of our appraisal process and system (2019), Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS) (2019) and a staff survey (December 2019). We will be taking part in the new Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) in 2021, which replaces CROS and PIRLS and will provide valuable feedback to further develop our action plan. Staff feedback has also been sought in 2021 on new ways of working following the pandemic.

The Working Group reports to Research Committee, chaired by the Deputy Principal (Research & Enterprise). Research Committee has responsibility for research strategy and operations and the Concordat self-assessment and action plan implementation. Research Committee oversee development of research staff, and has representation across the academic Institutes, professional services, Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and PhD students. It is also responsible for overseeing central research funds, eg bridging funding. Research 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 and, in particular, a more inclusive community for staff at all stages of their career. For actions that are tailored for research staff and students, Athena Swan SAT work closely with the Deputy Principal (Research & Enterprise) to ensure effective implementation and integrated support for researchers.

Section 2: Key achievements and progress against strategy and actions identified in St George's, University of London six-year review action plan (May 2020- May 2022)

The current action plan reflects our commitment to developing researchers. Many of the actions are ongoing initiatives. However, considerable progress has been made on a number of actions over the past year, despite the pandemic, which further improve our ability to develop and support research staff. Nevertheless, the Covid pandemic has impacted our ability to achieve some of the action plan, particularly within the timescale originally envisaged.

Environment and Culture

- Our action to promote and enable organisational commitment to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) principles has largely been completed. St George's, University of London signed up to DORA in 2019. A new working group was established representing all research institutes and career stages to provide overall strategy and leadership in the key implementation areas. A statement of commitment to the DORA principles is available on the [university website](#) and training materials, guidance and resources have been created and disseminated. This includes guidance for the Academic Promotions Committee as well as potential applications for academic promotion. These actions have received positive feedback from the university's academic community.
- Our action plan includes actions around promoting diversity in research careers. As part of this, our equality analysis process has been redesigned. This is being trialled in pilots, which will provide case studies for future reference. A similar template was used for Research Excellence Framework (REF) equality analysis, with our REF submission taking place in March 2021.
- A new Research Ethics and Integrity Officer was appointed in early 2020 who has supported our action to ensure that research at St George's, University of London is conducted to rigorous standards and maintains an environment that facilitates this process. The Research Ethics and Integrity Officer has produced our annual research integrity reports and widened understanding across the university. In addition, normal research training includes training on experimental design, statistics, reproducibility etc to ensure rigorous standards. In the past year we have started to introduce laboratory related policies, procedures and guidance documentation and support research integrity. Documentation for five policies/procedures have already been approved by the Research Committee (March 2021). In addition, a Head of Laboratory Space and Safety was appointed from 1st January 2021, whose remit is focused on laboratory safety in particular, with three other staff supporting these activities. The postholder is responsible for development of a new laboratories inspection strategy and plan, working together with the Safety Management Committee.
- Improving data collection and analysis is largely complete. The HR system which was introduced in 2018 has enabled improved reporting, including diversity characteristics in all relevant reports. However, as outlined later, further work is required on identifying different researcher groups.

Employment

- Steps have been taken with regard to our action to strengthen recruitment processes to ensure fairness and transparency and ensuring those involved in recruitment attend appropriate training. Our Diversity and Inclusion Adviser offers face-to-face unconscious bias training for recruitment panel members and has continued to provide this training remotely during the pandemic. In addition, in November 2020, we commenced a pilot of "Fair Recruitment Specialists", 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. The core aims of this pilot initiative will be to show visible diversity to our interview candidates, ensure multiple perspectives are included in hiring decisions and offer development opportunities to the individuals volunteering to become a Fair Recruitment Specialist. We received double the number

of volunteers than we had anticipated (30) and were successful in securing a “Good Practice Grant” from AdvanceHE (the organisation that supports diversity across the HE sector and awards Athena Swan and the Race Equality Charter status). In return we will share our experiences of the initiative with AdvanceHE. In addition, an annual report of recruitment outcomes by diversity characteristics is produced, which considers whether there are any causes for concern with regard to parity of outcome for different groups. The Fair Recruitment Specialist pilot will be reviewed after 12 months of operation but, to date, has received very positive feedback from both the specialists themselves and recruiting managers.

- In 2020, new “Talk and Transform” workshops were commissioned, aimed at staff in management positions. These workshops aim to support leaders and managers to be able to talk about race effectively and at the earliest opportunity, to promote mutual understanding across our diverse workforce and foster positive work relationships. To date 54 leaders and managers have taken part in these workshops.
- A Mandatory Training Policy was launched in April 2021. The policy, which was agreed by Executive Board and the Unions, aims to outline the roles and responsibilities of everyone within the university with respect to mandatory training, as well as set out the central mandatory training that each individual is required to undertake. All staff are required to undertake mandatory training for health and safety, diversity and inclusion, information security, and the Prevent Duty. Improved monitoring of mandatory training compliance will follow.
- Our annual public sector equality duty report considers the diversity profile of our workforce, including part-time working and staff on fixed-term contracts. This reporting is made available to Institute Directors for them to consider whether action is required to improve outcomes for researchers. In addition, each academic Institute has undertaken a “deep dive” as part of our Athena Swan monitoring, in order to consider their diversity profile in more depth and potential actions required to improve the staff diversity profile. This has involved reviewing the profile of employees working in the Institute over at least the previous five years, including consideration of their diversity profile, in particular sex. As a result of the deep dive, the Institutes have considered any further actions required, albeit with a particular emphasis on the institutional Athena Swan action plan. For example, the Institutes may ensure that all new lecturers are assigned a mentor or the Institute Director may contact individuals to encourage them to apply for academic promotion.
- A new Personal Development Review (PDR) was introduced in October 2020 which should assist our actions to deliver effective and timely PDRs and improve talent development and succession planning for researchers. 2021 represented the first year of its use and feedback from this year will be used to improve the PDR going forwards. As part of the introduction of the new PDR an annual timeframe for completion of PDRs was introduced (January – March). This should more effectively ensure all staff have annual PDRs and support departments and institutes to manage and capture completion rates. The new PDR includes prompts for Reviewers and Reviewees to discuss career development aims and aspirations, including promotion.
- In support of researcher career development, annual workshops are offered on the academic promotions round. In 2021 separate online workshops were offered to individuals according to the level being applied for (Senior Lecturer, Reader or Professor) in order to tailor the advice more readily to the audience. Anecdotally this was well received. In addition, annual reporting of promotion outcomes is provided, including by diversity characteristics.
- Our action plan includes an action to “Ensure inductions and support are the right fit centrally, at Research Institute level and locally”. A Researcher Induction Task and Finish Group was established in March 2021 to oversee the design and implementation of a new format for induction of researchers. A complete, new researcher PDF guide with information relevant for settling into the university research community, including guidance on all areas of support available to researchers will be produced. A new addition to the induction information will be a section on line manager’s and employee’s responsibilities. The first version will be produced in the Autumn of 2021.
- Representation of research staff and PhD students on relevant/applicable university committees and more widely across the university has been completed with groups represented at relevant committees and working groups including Research Committee, Athena Swan SAT, HREiRA working group, DORA working group and REF Steering Executive. In addition, representation at Research Day has been broadened. The last Research Day took place remotely in December 2020 and the next Research Day is already scheduled for December 2021.
- One of our actions related to pay progression for researchers. This is complete, as far as it can be. An equal pay audit was undertaken in 2021 which did not give rise to concerns and suggests that the new starting salary policy, introduced in 2018, has improved pay parity for new entrants. The

impact of the pandemic on university finances led to merit awards being suspended and therefore they will not be reviewed within the timeframe of the action plan. Our gender and ethnicity pay gaps continue to be higher than we would wish, but this is impacted by staff on NHS salary scales which cannot be influenced by the university.

Professional and Career Development

- Our new PDR links to our training database, enabling researchers and their managers to consider development undertaken over the past year. The PDR form also specifically asks the question of how many days of Continuous Professional Development has been undertaken over the past year. This data is then made available to Directors. It will take time for this new approach to embed but the PDR provides a prompt for researchers and their managers to properly consider professional development opportunities.
- As part of our commitment to embedding mentoring and coaching skills organisationally, following the mentoring review, the PhD/Postdoc Mentoring pilot was launched in July 2020 with lecturers and senior lecturers mentoring PhD students and Postdocs to support professional and career development. We will be reviewing this first cohort shortly and looking to recruit more mentors and embed the pilot in 2021/22.
- In line with the action plan, relevant training continues to be made available to researchers, although this has been made more challenging during the pandemic. While most training, seminars, conferences etc transferred to remote provision, this took some time to set up and does not always provide quite the same impact as in person learning.
- In support of professional development, our Institutes run several internal seminar programmes where junior researchers can develop their skills at presentation, and also learn about skills/techniques in use by other St George's, University of London researchers which may be helpful for their own research.
- In 2021 a restructure of our Research Operations Directorate was undertaken. As a result, a clearer pathway for development and career progression of the staff working in Research Operations has been developed, which aids our action to support career development.
- Our new PDR also supports our action of "Greater recognition and acceptance that researchers may leave for jobs outside academia" as it specifically includes prompts for discussions about career aims and development needs.

Section 3: Next steps and the focus of St George's strategy for the next year (2021-2022), including success measures

Further work is still required 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 to be run in May 2021 and May 2022. The Working Group also recommended to Research Committee that Postdocs be included in the surveys to ensure their views are included to support future action planning.

We are aiming to support employee wellbeing initiatives, including through feedback mechanisms. We currently intend to undertake a staff engagement pulse survey in December 2021, as a follow up to the last full staff survey (December 2019) and to receive feedback on the return to more onsite working.

In addition, further work remains to separately identify groups of researchers in HR reports (ECRs, Research Assistants, Principal Investigators etc) in order to enable trend analysis. However, the different staff groups and forums which have been created, including PhD students, Post Docs, Lecturers and Senior Lecturers assist in enabling consultation and consideration of their specific views and needs.

As stated above, work has commenced on creating new researcher policies, procedures and guidance. 17 areas needing such documentation have been identified, with documentation for five areas already approved. The remaining documentation will be produced over the next 12-18 months.

Further development of and guidance for DORA principles in our recruitment processes is required and is expected to be completed in 2021. Success of this will be measured by the broadening of criteria being used to determine research outcomes.

We are due to renew our disability confident status in 2021. Further work on embedding disability inclusion is needed and will form much of the work around the application for our next award. We are currently running a survey and focus groups for staff who have disabilities, the findings will inform what actions we take forward to improve disability inclusion. Renewal will be the primary measure of success.

The pandemic, alongside staff changes, have meant that the action to develop a workload management model has been delayed. A formal review is now unlikely to occur within the timeframe of the current action plan. However, as part of the new PDR process, there is increased emphasis on researchers, and other staff, discussing their workload distribution with their line manager, including their work/life balance.

One of our actions is to ensure that flexible working requests are fairly and consistently managed. As stated above, workload distribution is considered as part of PDRs and our PDR guidance advises academics to “add any relevant comments about your work-life balance or flexible working that you undertake or would like to undertake. It is important that these comments form the basis of a conversation with your Reviewer, especially if you wish to review your working pattern or make changes. Consider whether a plan needs to be developed for adjustment and how the institute can help or support you with this.” In addition, we have a project underway surrounding the return of all staff to onsite working following the pandemic. As part of this, a new flexible working policy will be introduced. This will occur later in 2021 once a full return to site is possible. However, it is already clear that we wish all staff to be able to request flexible working but the extent to which different options may be available to them will depend on the type of role they undertake. For example, laboratory-based researchers will have less opportunities to work from home than some other staff. However, we are keen to ensure that staff feel empowered to discuss their workload and flexible working with their manager. Success of the PDR and flexible working policy will be determined via staff feedback.

Further improvements to the PDR process will take place following feedback this year. Ongoing success of the PDR process will be measured through staff feedback, particularly via staff survey and CEDARS responses.

A new Research Integrity website presence is under development and should be completed in the next few months.

Further work on embedding equality analysis within research and education activities is expected over the coming year. One measure of success will be that equality analysis is routinely undertaken when new initiatives or policies are introduced.

Ahead of our next Athena Swan submission in 2022, academic career progression will be analysed. We are aware that there are some positive case studies on progression, including transition from fixed-term to permanent lecturers and promotions to senior lecturers. However, Covid-19 has changed the research funding environment quite significantly, with a reduction in funds available, and is particularly challenging for researchers on short-term contracts. We have applied for funding from the Wellcome Trust to support research of those on short-term contracts and working on research projects that have been given no-cost extensions. However, the current situation means that career uncertainty will persist for this group of researchers. This will continue to be monitored over the next year. Success will hopefully be measurable through staff retention and further funding.