



HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) – Eight Year Review 2022

Background

St George's, University of London (SGUL) is distinctive as the UK's only independent medical and healthcare Higher Education Institution, employing approximately 750 staff, of whom around 40% are employed within our research institutes or support research. SGUL shares its main campus with St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust ("the Trust"), one of the UK's largest teaching hospitals. SGUL 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.

SGUL 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 SGUL, to other HEIs or related employment. This includes close working with the Trust. [In our Strategic Vision 2030, our research objectives are to: pursue a culture of research excellence based around collaboration, which reward innovation and promote 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.](#)

[To recognise the nature of clinical and non-clinical research, we consider research staff to include Research Assistants and Research Fellows who are usually Postdocs, as well as academic staff \(Lecturers, Senior Lecturers, Readers and Professors\) and Research Technicians/Support Staff. For the purposes of our action plan, when referring to Early Career Researchers \(ECRs\) we are mainly considering Postdocs, Research Assistants/Fellows, \[with a particular emphasis on researchers on fixed-term contracts\]\(#\), as well as Lecturers in the early stages of their career. However, development opportunities are also provided to MD\(Res\) and PhD students via the Common Postgraduate Framework and Graduate School Skills Programme. Students also have access to the University of London Careers Service.](#)

Section 1: How internal evaluation is undertaken

Monitoring the Concordat action plan is undertaken by our HREiR Working Group, which liaises with relevant stakeholders to determine progress and includes representatives from PhD students, the Post-doc forum, HR, Joint Research and Enterprise Service (JRES), Research Technicians, academics and the Athena SWAN lead, the Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). [For the 8-year review](#), the Working Group [was](#) chaired by the Director of HR&OD and the Learning and OD Manager.

The Working Group reports to Research Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise). Research Committee has responsibility for research strategy and operations and the Concordat self-assessment and action plan. Research 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 Committee reports to Executive Board, which in turn reports to Council.

[Surveys and staff feedback help determine progress of our action plan. A new Post-doc survey \(23% response\) was developed to supplement feedback from the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey \(CEDARS\) \(33% response rate\), the postgraduate student survey \(PRES\) \(46% response rate\) and staff pulse survey in 2021 \(47% response\).](#)

Staff feedback was sought in 2021 on new ways of working following the pandemic and bespoke surveys were undertaken, eg to identify issues of discrimination and harassment amongst postgraduates. Survey results are shared with Research Committee, Institute Directors and Heads of Sections (HOS).

Much of the action plan dovetails with university wide actions forming 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 EDI and supported by an Athena SWAN self-assessment team (SAT) and Race Equality Action and Engagement Group (REAEG). [Input from research staff has informed our approach to training and EDI activities.](#) Two new Associate Dean roles were created in 2021 – Associate Dean for

Culture and Development, who is also in the HREiR Working Group, and Associate Dean for Equality and Diversity Enhancement.

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 6-year action plan reflects our commitment to developing researchers. Considerable progress has been made, although many actions are ongoing. Nevertheless, the Covid pandemic impacted our ability to achieve some of the action plan, particularly within the timescales originally envisaged.

Environment and Culture

Action (ECI2.2) to promote and enable organisational commitment to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) principles is complete. SGUL signed up to DORA in 2019. A new working group was established representing all research institutes and career stages to provide strategy and leadership in the key implementation areas. A statement of commitment to DORA principles is available on the [university website](#) and training materials, guidance and resources were created and disseminated.

Promoting diversity in research careers formed a key part of our action plan (ECI2.1, ECM1). Our equality analysis process was redesigned and a similar template used for Research Excellence Framework (REF) equality analysis. The Dean for EDI ran EDI Insight sessions for all academic institutes.

A new Research Ethics and Integrity Officer was appointed in 2020 who supports our action to ensure that research is conducted to rigorous standards and maintains an environment that facilitates this process (ECI5.1). She regularly engages with the Research Institutes delivering presentations and running interactive workshops on research ethics and integrity, widening understanding across the University. She produces our annual research integrity reports and has updated the Research Integrity Code of Conduct, approved in December 2021. In addition, general Research Skills training is provided which includes training on experimental design, statistics, reproducibility etc to ensure rigorous standards and 'ResearchAware', a series of research training seminars aimed at clinical staff who are interested in conducting research (PCDI1.1). In the past year we have started to introduce laboratory related policies, procedures and guidance documentation and support research integrity (ECI5.2). By early 2022 eleven policies/procedures had been approved by Research Committee. In addition, a Head of Laboratory Space and Safety was appointed in 2021, focused on laboratory safety and responsible for development of a new lab inspection strategy and plan, working with the Safety Management Committee.

Improving data collection and analysis is largely complete (ECI6.1). The HR system, introduced in 2018, enables improved reporting, including diversity in all relevant reports, eg annual reports are now produced on promotions, recruitment and leavers. Our analysis has shown that over the past 5 years, male and female academics are broadly as likely to be promoted (67% success) and similar promotion rates are also noted across broad ethnicity groups. However, we would like to see more women and staff from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds apply for promotion. Encouragement and support for promotion is an action going forward (forward action E13). In 2021, 35% of professors in our research institutes are women (40% across all academic institutes). This compares to 28% of all HE professors being female according to [HESA data](#) for 2020/21.

Employment

Steps have been taken to strengthen recruitment processes to ensure fairness and transparency and ensuring those involved in recruitment attend appropriate training (E11.1). Our EDI Adviser offers face-to-face unconscious bias training for recruitment panel members and provided this remotely during the pandemic. In November 2020, we introduced "Fair Recruitment Specialists", who are staff from ethnic minority backgrounds who volunteer to sit on recruitment panels in order to address issues of underrepresentation in our recruitment activities. We received double the number of volunteers that we had anticipated (30) and were successful in securing a "Good Practice Grant" from AdvanceHE. In return, we shared 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 causes for concern with regard to parity of outcome for different groups. The Fair Recruitment Specialist initiative has received very positive feedback from both the specialists and recruiting managers and has improved the diversity of recruitment panels. However, fewer academic/researcher panels include a Fair Recruitment Specialist than we would like, and this remains an ongoing aim (forward action E11). For Professional Services and Technical Support roles, anonymised sifting is also undertaken, although this has not proven to be possible to introduce for academics due to the nature of their work (publications etc). The most recent staff survey

indicated the majority (>90%) of respondents felt the process was inclusive, transparent and merit based.

Our annual public sector equality duty report considers the diversity profile of our workforce, including part-time and fixed-term contracts. It is made available to Institute Directors for them to consider any action needed to improve outcomes for researchers. Each academic institute also undertook a “deep dive” as part of our Athena SWAN monitoring, to consider their diversity profile in more depth. As a result, institutes have implemented further actions, eg ensuring all new lecturers are assigned a mentor or encouraging applications for academic promotion.

In 2020, new “Talk and Transform” workshops were commissioned, aimed at line managers, to enable them to talk about race effectively, promote mutual understanding across our diverse workforce and foster positive work relationships. 84 leaders and managers took part in the workshops in 2020/21 of which 26% were research managers/leaders. The workshops will be run again this year to build on this work and offering sessions to all staff.

In 2022 we have introduced Disability Confident Training for Managers with a view to enabling managers to feel more comfortable in supporting colleagues with disabilities.

A Mandatory Training Policy was launched in April 2021. The policy, which was agreed by Executive Board and the Unions, outlines roles and responsibilities for mandatory training, and includes health and safety, EDI, information security, Prevent Duty and Digital Accessibility. Improving uptake of EDI training for researchers (Action ECM1) aims to improve and promote a healthy and supportive working environment. The updated researcher induction guide (EI2.2) highlights health and safety within research.

A new Personal Development Review (PDR) was introduced in October 2020 which should assist our actions to deliver effective and timely PDRs (EI5.1) and improve talent development and succession planning for researchers (EI5.2). 2021 was the first year of its use and feedback each year is used to improve the PDR going forwards. An annual timeframe for completion of PDRs was introduced (January–March), which has already improved completion rates (>75% for research institutes). The new PDR includes prompts for reviewers and reviewees to discuss career development aims, including promotion. There are 12 relatively newly appointed HOS in the research institutes who have been trained specifically on career management and support for ECR’s. The HOS add consistency to PDRs, an issue highlighted by previous staff surveys. ECRs on a fixed-term contract are also expected to have a PDR completed where their future and career aspirations would be expected to be discussed.

In support of researcher career development (EI5.2), annual workshops are offered on the academic promotions round. In 2022 separate online workshops were offered to individuals according to the promotion route being applied for, Research or Education, to tailor the advice more readily to the audience. 12 researchers signed up for the 2022 workshop, which is also available as a recording. One third of applicants for promotion this year (6) have applied via the research or education & research route. Annual reporting of promotion outcomes is undertaken.

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 (Action E12.2). A complete, new researcher “Arrival and Survival Guide” was launched in December 2021 and advertised to both new and existing researchers. Updating the guide remains an ongoing action (forward action EI2).

Representation of research staff and PhD students on relevant university committees and more widely has been completed (EI7) with representation at Research Committee, Athena SWAN SAT, REAEG, HREiR working group, DORA working group, Research Operations Working Group and REF Steering Executive. The most recent CEDARS data indicated an increase in the proportion of staff (>80%) who felt they were able to participate in the decision-making process. [Our annual University Research Day now includes presentations from and awards for researchers across the academic pipeline, including an Outstanding Postdoctoral Research Scientist Award.](#)

Research integrity and culture workshops have been run by the Research Ethics and Integrity Officer (EI5.1), who has also showcased research outputs to our Professional and Technical Support Staff Working Group which covers staff [working in professional services and technical roles, including Postdoctoral clinical trial managers.](#)

Enhanced investment in research support, particularly from the Wellcome Trust Institutional Strategic Support Fund (>£220K), has been provided in 2021/22 with a focus on mitigating the impact of Covid on research (EI6.2/EI6.3). A research student hardship fund was set up related to the pandemic, including donations from research institute funds and an alumni appeal. Applications are invited for delayed PhD

research projects, research programmes interrupted by redeployment or re-targeting of research focus, public and community engagement, to address EDI issues and for assistance with personal circumstances. There has been targeted support for three ECR lecturers and a Public Engagement Officer. [We also created two Postdoctoral translational research fellowships, in partnership with the Rosetrees Trust and St George's Hospital Charity.](#)

In our 2021 staff pulse survey, individuals who classified themselves as researchers (39 staff) were the most positive group after the senior management team in response to the question "I would recommend St George's as a great place to work".

Professional and Career Development

The majority of respondents (76%) in CEDARS 2021 agree/strongly agree that the institution treats them fairly regarding access to training and development opportunities. In line with our action plan, training is made available to researchers (ECI2.3, PCDI1.1 and PCDI1.2).

The majority of CEDARS 2021 respondents had a PDR in last two years (90%), with 62% finding it useful/very useful (action EI5.1), although our staff pulse survey was less positive with only 41% of researchers agreeing that "My Personal Development Review (PDR) is a forum to recognise my potential and contribution". Our new PDR links to our training database, enabling researchers and their managers to consider development undertaken. The PDR form also specifically asks how many days Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has been undertaken, with these data made available to Institute Directors. It will take time for this new approach to embed and this is therefore an ongoing action (forward action PCDI1 and PCDI2). The new PDR form and guidance also supports our action of "Greater recognition and acceptance that researchers may leave for jobs outside academia" (PCDI5.2) as it specifically includes prompts for discussions about career aims and development needs. An ongoing action is to develop industry links to support these discussions (forward action PCDI5).

As part of our commitment to embedding mentoring and coaching skills (PCDI1.3) a PhD/Post-doc Mentoring pilot was launched in July 2020 with lecturers and senior lecturers mentoring PhD students and Post-docs to support professional and career development. Following very successful feedback, we aim to recruit 50% more mentors and mentees over the next 3 years and embed the pilot in 2022/23. [Post-docs may become mentors for ethnic minority students wanting to pursue research careers as part of the award-winning programme, Equal Representation in Academia \(launched in 2021\).](#) We also established a Manager as Coach programme in 2019 and now run this annually, supporting the development of coaching skills as part of our leadership and management development offer.

In 2021 our Research Operations Directorate, which provides technician and administrative support to researchers and research, was restructured. As a result, a clearer pathway for development and career progression for Research Operations staff was developed, which supports our career development actions.

[Bespoke workshops on public engagement \(2021-22\) enable an increasing number of researchers to contribute to internal and external public engagement events. Development in public engagement was highlighted by the Post-doc survey and 25% of training attendees were Post-doc or fellows. Our Public Engagement Seed Funding further supports researchers develop their ideas \(forward action PCDR1\).](#)

From December 2021 our Learning and OD Manager and Research Ethics and Integrity Officer have been delivering sessions raising awareness of the Concordat and support provided by Vitae to our Research Institutes and have sessions planned for the PhD students, the Postdoc forum and research technicians (ECI1). Engagement has been very positive, and staff have also given additional feedback around their current development needs. Our forward action EC11 to maintain awareness aims to see improved outcomes via CEDARS with the majority of respondents being aware of the Concordat.

In 2022, Research England funding has been used to boost staff training to improve research culture, active allyship, and management and leadership skills of researchers. [Active engagement from the Post-doc forum resulted in tailored training being delivered to fill knowledge gaps, such as statistics seminars.](#) Ongoing actions around training and development are covered by forward actions EI4, PCID3 and PCDR3.

Section 3: Next steps and the focus of St George's strategy for the next four years (2022-26), including success measures

As SGUL's 2017-2022 strategy [reached its conclusion](#), we look to build on our progress as we develop our strategy for the next years. A key part of our future research strategy will be to pursue a culture of research excellence based around collaboration, which rewards innovation and promotes equal opportunities and to

attract and retain research talent, developing the leaders of tomorrow through tailored training and personal development programs. [We aim to increase engagement with fixed-term contract researchers and expand the HREiR Working Group, to be led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor \(Research and Enterprise\)'s Deputy. Three new Post-doc representatives will be recruited, as well as additional Lecturer and Senior Lecturer representatives who successfully line-manage Post-docs.](#)

Environment and Culture

Improving researcher awareness of the Concordat and Vitae resources is a consistent theme, this year for example, regular, formal presentations to Research Institutes were started and will be integrated into the welcome programme for new staff. Success will be measured through staff feedback, including via CEDARS, where we are aiming for the majority of our Researchers (70%) to be aware of the Concordat by 2025. Forward action ECI1. [We also intend to continue running our bespoke Post-doc survey and include a question on the Concordat, as well as running focus groups \(forward actions ECI1 and ECR1\).](#)

In the last 3 years, we have established a focus on employee wellbeing initiatives, including through feedback mechanisms. We have just completed the "trial and develop" stage of our Future Ways of Working project which considers working practices post-pandemic. This stage completed in May 2022 and staff feedback from the Pulse Survey 2021 informed key steps, including clarity around our flexible working policy. Monitoring will take place via staff feedback including ongoing positive responses in our staff surveys to the question "I am satisfied with the balance I can strike between my work and home life" (77% for researchers in 2021). Forward action ECM4.

New Research Integrity workshops will be provided to the Research Institutes including moral dilemmas, past cases of research misconduct and how to deal with harassment and bullying. [A new Research Integrity website presence has been developed, completed in 2022.](#) We will monitor this through improved CEDARS responses, aiming for the majority of respondents to have completed training on research integrity. Forward action ECI5/ECM2.

The pandemic, alongside staff changes, meant that the action to develop a workload management model has been delayed. This will be revisited in light of SGUL's new strategy, and we aim to maintain the positive response around work/life balance in our staff surveys (forward action ECI3). Further improvements to the PDR process will also feed into workload management with increased emphasis on researchers discussing their workload distribution with their line manager. Ongoing success of the PDR process will be measured through staff feedback, particularly via staff surveys and CEDARS, with the aim of improving the positive response to the staff survey question "My Personal Development Review (PDR) is a forum to recognise my potential and contribution" (41% for researchers in 2021).

Employment

We will continue to improve and embed fair recruitment practices for research roles [and aim to increase diversity among our Research Assistants and Fellows \(forward action EI1\).](#) Our annual review of recruitment demonstrated that recruitment panels for academic roles were less likely to be balanced, in particular in terms of ethnicity of interviewers, than for professional services roles. Forward action EI1 addresses this, where we are aiming for 60% of academic/researcher recruitment panels to be balanced by 2025. These actions cross-link with our Athena SWAN action plan (a new Silver Award submission is due in July 2023) and continuing development of the race equality action plan. Forward action ECI2.

Professional and Career Development

We will continue to address and improve the engagement of our researchers with training and career development opportunities available to them, following the feedback from CEDARS 2021. This includes identifying barriers and enablers to engagement through focus groups/meetings with the researcher stakeholder groups [and improvements in career discussions.](#) [We will continue to run the George's Academic Training programme which aims to give clinical academics, especially those in early career stages, an avenue for conducting research, often towards a higher degree such as an MD or PhD, to fit in within their clinical training.](#) We will look to obtain feedback via focus groups and increase the CEDARS response so that the majority of respondents confirm that they have completed training for managing others and project management where relevant. [All Post-docs will now be offered mentoring on joining SGUL from 2023 and we also aim to develop bespoke management training for researchers, supported by Research England funding.](#) A further aim which has resulted from feedback from our Post-doc forum is to ensure that [public engagement features more prominently in continuous professional development.](#) This is covered by forward actions EI4, PCID1, PCDR1, PCID3 and PCDR3.