



HR Excellence in Research Award – Six Year Review

This report outlines the approach St George's, University of London has adopted in undertaking its six-year internal self-assessment of progress in achieving its Action Plan for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. The revised 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 was undertaken

The internal self-assessment for our six-year review and development of the updated action plan was 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. In addition, staff feedback has fed into the new action plan, including via a review of mentoring in 2018, a review of our appraisal process and system (2019), CROS and PIRLS (2019) and a staff survey (December 2019). The revised action plan is an update of the original plan and has been developed to reflect the September 2019 Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the three core principles of the Concordat, as they relate to institutions.

The self-assessment and action plan implementation is overseen by Research Committee, chaired by the Deputy Principal (Research & Enterprise). Research Committee has responsibility for research strategy and operations, including 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, 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 2017-2021. These are overseen by the Athena SWAN SAT, led by the Deputy Principal (Institutional Affairs) and Associate Dean for Culture, Development and Inclusion. The actions reflect our commitment to advancing gender 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 four year review action plan (2018-2020)

The current action plan reflects our commitment to developing researchers. This is an ongoing commitment and many of the actions from the four-year review have been carried forward as ongoing initiatives. However, a number of actions have been completed over the past two years. These now improve our ability to develop and support research staff.

Environment and Culture

- A number of research staff groups have been formed, alongside the already established Postdoc forum, which has enabled representatives to attend key organisational committees. The groups include PhD reps, the lecturers' forum, a senior lecturers 'group' and Public Engagement champions. As a result, representatives for Post Docs, PhDs, research technicians and ECRs now routinely sit on key organisational groups/Committees including the Research Committee, the REF 2021

Steering Executive, Athena SWAN SAT, Senate and HREIRA working group.

- St George's, University of London signed up to DORA in 2019, to embed the DORA principles as part of our ongoing commitment to researcher development. A new working group has been established representing all research institutes and career stages to provide overall strategy and leadership in the key implementation areas of recruitment, promotion and career-advancement policies and practices.
- We have improved the quality of our recruitment data, including EDI data, which has been made available for analysis in order to take timely action. For example, analysis of our recruitment data demonstrated that proportionately fewer BAME candidates were successful at the shortlisting stage. As a result, we have introduced anonymised sifting in add date.
- Demographic data reports now routinely include job roles, contract type, clinical status, and Institute affiliation as essential reporting metrics. Such reports are made available to management teams and enable them to highlight outliers or unexpected statistics.
- 20 of HR policies have been reviewed and updated, including in relation to flexible working (which includes case studies of successful flexible working), shared parental leave and for reasonable adjustments as a result of disability.
- The probation policy has been updated to include greater guidance around the mandatory training expected of new researchers when joining the university, for example with regard to health and safety and information governance.
- We have developed and grown the wellbeing and mental health offer, supporting staff and students in the workplace. Adult Mental Health First Aid awareness was delivered by Mental Health First Aid England and attended by 75 staff. 16 staff have also trained as Adult Mental Health First Aiders in 2019. We have ensured this wellbeing offer is aligned with other university wellbeing initiatives.

Employment

- Monthly reports are sent to academic Institutes of fixed-term contract end dates so that preparation work can be undertaken to either move to permanency, extend or explore new funding opportunities. In addition, automatic email alerts have been created for managers of staff on a fixed-term contract reminding them of the contract end date at regular intervals. In our 2109 staff survey one response to the question "What is the best thing about working for St George's?" was "Management do their utmost to keep staff with short term contracts in post". However, this item remains on the action plan while the steps already taken continue to bed in.
- A review of bridging funds for researchers was completed in September 2019 by the Deputy Principal (Research and Enterprise). Requests are now more systematically considered and the funds are better advertised. Using the bridging fund scheme to support FTC researchers to apply for further funding and extend their employment has been successful and a high percentage of those supported go onto receive further research funding (up to 75%) and employment at St George's, University of London (>60%). JRES are responsible for the bridging fund process and monitoring its usage.
- In addition, our fixed-term contract management guidance has been reviewed by the HEIRA working group with a view to ensure that it guides managers in considering permanency, where possible. Consultation with the unions has started on the new guidance but was interrupted by Covid-19.
- We have introduced a new starting salary policy with the aim of standardising starting pay and preventing pay gaps from being perpetuated on appointment.
- Following ongoing consultation, the ECR Induction day was reinvigorated and aimed at all new researchers not just ECRs. This includes induction for Postdocs and separately for lecturers, to include the specific requirements of their role.

Professional and Career Development

- The changing research assessment environment prompted by DORA has and will have, a significant impact on researcher development to embed the principles in every day practice and researcher career progression pathways.
- Although there is more to do, some improvement has been seen in satisfaction rates of researchers with regard to access to training and development opportunities and career progression. The CROS survey of 2017 showed 78% satisfaction which increased to 88% in 2019, whereas PIRLs remained relatively stable at 88% in 2017 and 86% in 2019. CROS 2019 also showed 50% agree/strongly agreed in being treated fairly in relation to opportunities for promotion and progression. In addition, St George's, University of London committed to funding at least 5 places on the Aurora Leadership programme but increased that number in each of the last two years (7 in 2018/19 and 8 in 2019/20).

- Consultation in 2019/20 with all staff groups to review our current appraisal system (Personal Reviews) is now allowing a cross organisational task and finish group to take forward the review recommendations. This will include ensuring professional development and career progression are a priority in the process.
- In December 2018 and 2019 an Academic Promotion Workshop was run, including feedback from successful applicants from the previous year on their experience of the process and hints and tips on what to include in an application. In addition, potential applicants are invited to be paired with a mentor who had been successful in the previous round. These elements are now a standard part of our academic promotion round. It is difficult to draw too many conclusions but in 2019 applications from women more than doubled (from 9 in 2018 to 21 in 2019) , whereas application numbers for men remained unchanged.
- Increased support is now offered to researchers with regard to grant writing, including JRES support to professionalise the research application process and peer review.
- A range of researchers at St George's, University of London are involved in teaching, including PhD students and Postdocs. CROS 2019 data shows 56% have undertaken teaching training and 84% have done teaching or lecturing. The Centre for Innovation and Development in Education (CIDE) provides training opportunities to develop this strand of their careers. The offer includes a CPD Scheme administered and accredited by CIDE in association with St George's Professional Education Centre (PEC), PGCert Healthcare & Biomedical Education (PGCert HBE) and St George's Health in Education (SHINE Fellowship CPD Route).
- There has been an increase in the number of rotational roles attracting a responsibility allowance, for example as Head of Section within an Institute. Over the review period (2018-2020), 6 new Associate Dean roles were created.
- St George's, University of London has continued to develop its commitment to Public Engagement in all its forms, from science communication through its successful Spotlight on Science events, to working in partnership with patients in education and research and in collaborating on unique projects with the local community. Opportunities have been introduced for PhD and Postdocs to develop key career skills through public engagement opportunities at an institute and cross university level, eg via Research Day and public engagement workshops/open evening events.
- A review of mentoring has been undertaken and new mentoring and coaching pilots have been established and new ones are starting in 2019/20, as outlined in the action plan.
- Template job descriptions have been amended to highlight the expected involvement of research staff in mentoring/coaching when working at St George's, University of London. In addition, mentoring and the expectation of mentoring is highlighted in the operational plan for research.
- We reviewed the training we offered and identified gaps. This has led to a new, enhanced central development offer, including inclusive leadership and leadership and management essentials.
- The university has joined the Outside/Insight scheme, offering opportunities for ECRs/research technicians to engage with work shadowing opportunities in partner HEIs.
- A new website was introduced in September 2019 which is considerably more user friendly than the previous intranet and enables staff to access relevant information more readily, including in relation to their career development and relevant policies.

Section 3: Next steps and the focus of St George's strategy for the next two years (2020-2022), including success measures

The action plan outlines the priority areas for St George's, University of London in relation to the career development, equal opportunities and wellbeing of our researchers, in accordance with the Concordat principles. In particular, further work is required on ensuring that researchers can be separately identified in HR reports (ECRs, RAs, PIs etc) in order to enable trend analysis. In addition, consideration will also be given to how to monitor the minimum of 10 days professional development pro-rata per year that the Concordat requires.

Success of the action plan will be measured through data analysis, staff engagement and feedback. St George's, University of London has taken part in the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and the Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS), CEDARS from 2020 and is committed to undertaking a full staff survey every two years, with smaller pulse surveys taking place in between and other feedback mechanisms at a local and cross university level with specific research staff groups. Such feedback enables us to prioritise areas for action, for example the redesign of our personal review process.