



HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiRA) – Annual Report 2024

This report outlines the progress St George's, University of London has made to support the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers* and progress against its 8-year HREiRA action plan. The next review will be the 11-year review in October 2025.

St George's, University of London (will merge with City University to become City St George's School of Health and Medical Sciences on the 1 August 2024) has been distinctive as the UK's only independent medical and healthcare Higher Education Institution, employing approximately 900+ staff, of whom around a third are engaged within our research institutes or support research within Research Operations (e.g. 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 four research institutes: Infection and Immunity (I&IRI), Cardiovascular and Genetics (CGRI), Neurosciences and Cell Biology (NCBRI) and Population Health (PHRI); and one educational institute: the Institute of Medical, Biomedical and Allied Health Education (IMBAE). St George's [Strategic Vision 2030](#) outlines our research objectives, which 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 Postdoctoral 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 HREiRA eight-year action plan is undertaken by the HREiRA Working Group including representatives from the PhD students the Postdoc forum, Human Resources, Joint Research and Enterprise Service (JRES), Research Technicians and academics. This group consults key stakeholders to determine progress against the eight-year action plan and any further actions that may be required.

In addition, employee 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 and networks.

The Working Group reports to Research and Enterprise Committee (REC), chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise). REC has responsibility for research strategy and operations and the Concordat self-assessment and action plan implementation. REC oversees the 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, e.g. bridging funding. REC reports to Executive Board, who in turn report to Council.

Many actions within the action plan align with university wide actions which form part of the Institutional Athena Swan Silver Award action plan 2023 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 and 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 HREiRA Working Group and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise) to ensure effective implementation and integrated support for researchers. The newly formed Research Culture working group is also developing priorities and actions that align the HREiRA action plan and support this work.

Preparing for the merger of St George's and City University to become City St George's has had some impact on the work of the HREiRA working group and the group will be considering how they should proceed with the HREiRA 11-review due in October 2025.

Section 2: Key achievements and progress against strategy and actions identified in St George's, University of London 8 - year review action plan (May 2022- May 2025)

The current HREiRA 8-action plan reflects our commitment to creating a research culture and environment that support researchers to thrive, to be empowered, to develop their career, and to work together positively. This plan commenced in May 2022, and some of the actions are ongoing initiatives. Progress that has been made over the past year (June 2023 – July 2024) is outlined below.

Environment and Culture

- Retaining the institutional Athena Swan Silver award in November 2023 acknowledged the continued work in promoting equity and diversity at the University. The proportion of female professors at St George's has continued to rise, up from 18% to 40% over the last decade. Representation of those from global majority backgrounds among academics, research, professional and technical staff has also increased to 32%.
- Participation in CEDARS 2023 (33% participation) supports our HREiRA eight-year Action Plan and contributes to REF, research culture strategy, staff development and EDI initiatives. Areas covered in the survey include recognition and value; professional and career development; environment and culture. The data shows we are performing above sector average (CEDARS 2023 national data). In the 2023 survey, we scored higher than the national average satisfaction on nearly all questions, with particularly high scores for valuing staff contributions, having a fair and inclusive promotion pathway, useful inductions, staff appraisals and supportive line management. We continue to receive very positive responses to our understanding of discrimination and ways to report bullying and harassment, and research misconduct. Compared to the 2021 survey, we have also improved our scores on career planning and having adequate time for professional development (including developing leadership skills), although there has been a slight decline in some areas, in terms of communication of clear expectations around behaviour and culture, and the importance placed on staff inclusion and mental health and wellbeing.
- An Associate Dean for Research Culture and an ECR Lead for Research Culture have

been appointed. They are now members of the HREiRA working group and chair the new Research Culture working group. They have been developing a Research Culture Strategy and action plan to deliver key themes of influencing widely, breaking barriers, building connections, embedding values which include key areas of development/improvement identified in the HREiRA action plan. As part of this work, they delivered a Research Culture Day, 19 June 2024. The theme was building connections, and the aims of the day were to: launch research culture at St George's; raise awareness of support and inspire early career researchers; foster a collaborative environment by bringing different groups of researchers together from diverse disciplines and backgrounds and encourage networking and interdisciplinary discussions to stimulate new ideas and potential collaborations. The St George's Research Culture Hub was launched at Research Culture Day and is now live on the website. This team are working with the research community to build a positive research culture, to ensure everyone in research feels empowered to do their best work and develop in their career. Researcher induction has been rejuvenated and updated in 2023/24. Researcher Induction mornings have been reintroduced and slides circulated to all researchers and added to our training pages.

- The Pulse Survey 2023 completed in December 2023 achieved a 60% response rate (+11% from the 2022). 80% of staff felt that St George's is committed to supporting diversity and inclusion and that our approach to flexible working 'works well for me personally'. PDR satisfaction in the Pulse Survey increased across the university to 51% from 45% in 2022. At a research institute level PDR satisfaction in MCS (now CGRI and NCBRI) is 59% (+7%), I&I is 45% (-6%) PHRI 61% (+10%) and IMBAE 51% (same as 2022). For Research Operations this was 55% (+3%).
- The University opened a new purpose-built Zebrafish Unit in May 2024 with dedicated technicians to support zebrafish research and allow our researchers to complete their projects in house and apply for new grants. In providing high-quality facilities and expertise for animal research, the BRF directly contributes to researchers' success in securing grants, production of excellent research outputs and improving the University's Research Excellence Framework score.
- Public engagement (PE) research events such as St George's 'Pint of Science' 2024 organised and delivered by PhD students, staff and postdocs delivered three successful events and these will continue to be funded into 2025.

Employment

- In 2023-2024, there has been a continued commitment to encourage the use of both Fair Recruitment Specialists and a balanced gendered panel when recruiting to research roles. Within this period, 30% of newly recruited Research Assistants and Fellows identified as Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME*). In addition, in autumn 2023, we reintroduced an induction specifically for research staff.
- There has been an improvement in staff promotion applications from ethnic minority staff. Analysis of the 2023/2024 Academic Promotion round showed that of the 22 total applicants, 50% identified as being from BAME background. Of these, 33.3% were successful in their application for promotion. This is an 11% increase on the 2022/2023 Academic Promotion round.
- With regards to fixed term contracts (FTC), we continue to reduce the proportion of research assistants and fellows who are on FTCs compared to permanent contracts, from 96%, at its highest, to 85% in 2023-2024. Over the last year, this commitment has extended to consider all eligible research staff including academic staff (Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Reader, and Professor), where appropriate. Where funding for a fixed term role is reasonably assured, if a post holder has been in post over 4 years, we have supported managers in making business cases to make these roles permanent. This has led to a slight reduction in those on FTCs over the last year.

- The Parent network was set up in May 2024 with the aim of offering support, information, and advice to staff returning from parental leave, ensuring a successful and supportive transition back to the workplace. The network allows staff to discover more about the support available including HR assistance, training and funding opportunities and help in managing workload expectations. This group is facilitated by the EDI team members and is in support of current Athena SWAN priorities.

Professional and Career Development

- Personal Development Review (PDR) participation has remained consistent at 73.8% in 2023 and 75.8% in 2024. Satisfaction with PDRs has gone up to 51% but this remains an area for development.
- A webpage for '[Training and Career Development for Research Staff](#)' was launched in Autumn 2023 to assist researchers in identifying training and staff development opportunities.
- Career development events for our early career researchers have been instituted and these Careers Evenings ran in November 2023 with the aim of repeating these in the 2024/25 academic year.
- A range of public engagement training and support has been delivered to meet the diverse activities of staff and students at St George's. X number of events were delivered in 2023 – 24. Four courses were offered in Public Engagement / Science Communication in the undergraduate/postgraduate curriculum and Public Engagement Seed Funding was available for a third year to enable staff and students to develop and deliver their own public engagement projects, 7 projects were funded (2023 – 2024).
- Two cohorts of leadership training for research leaders have been delivered. The programme included development days, 360 assessment and feedback and participation in Action Learning Sets (ALS) with incredibly positive feedback from the participants as to the impact and learning they have been able to take back into their teams.
- Regular grant writing sessions were commissioned in 2023/24 with 33 staff participating. Participants were offered online workshops, one to one coaching and access to online resources. These were well received and recommissioned for 2024/25. There has been greater demand for these workshops as the need to understand how research grants are awarded and how this affects the way to write applications is an area of focus for ECRs.
- The Research Integrity Officer delivered 13 presentations/workshops reaching over 200 researchers and students and 24 online drop-in sessions supporting 36 staff in the last academic year. This has allowed ECRs to gain a more in depth understanding of the ethics and integrity processes, enabling their applications to be more thorough, increasing the likelihood of favourable opinion (approval) for their applications.
- Shared Connections is an annual event for professional and technical services staff. In June 2023 Professional and Technical Services awards were launched to recognise the work of these teams and individuals. In June 2024 150 members of professional and technical services staff participated in the Professional and Technical Services day, and this included a range of 50-minute workshops, visits and sessions as well as a keynote session.
- The new Culture leads, as part their work to develop the Research Culture strategy, have consulted with the following key stakeholder groups: PhD students, postdoctoral Research fellows, lecturers, senior lecturers, readers and leadership in the last 4 months and this feedback has supported the development of Research Culture Day and current actions/activities to further develop our research culture and environment.

Section 3: Next steps and the focus of St George's strategy for the next year (2024-2025), including success measures.

As of the 1 August SGUL will become City St George's, and St George's, School of Health

and Medical Sciences. The HREiRA 8-year action plan will be kept under review, with a view to incorporate opportunities brought on as a result of infrastructural changes. The working group will consult with Vitae about how to take the 11-year review forward following merger and gain an understanding of our options in holding the HREiRA award as City St George's moving forward.

Key areas for development were identified in the CEDARS 2023 analysis and will need to be taken into account in planning researcher development activities for 2024/25. Feedback from a new Postdoc survey in Autumn 2024, the Research Culture strategy and actions will support the working group in developing current activities/actions and that would support the 11-year review. CEDARS 2025 will allow us to measure impact of our 8-year HREiRA action plan. Sharing experience, good practice and resources will help us to provide an equitable researcher experience across the University.

Environment and Culture

- The next CEDARS survey is scheduled for April 2025. We noted that in our 2023 survey did not reach all active researchers (33% participation in 2023) and would aim to improve participation in 2025 >50%. Of the 66 researchers who participated in CEDARS 2023, only 17% were ECRs. The aim would be to reach a higher proportion of ECRs in 2025.
- The HREiRA group aims to work with the Postdoc forum and reps to develop an updated Postdoc survey for Autumn 2024. This will give us additional feedback enabling us to address the needs of this cohort of researchers in addition to the CEDARS 2023 feedback and the informal feedback gathered from ECRs through the continuing research culture consultation.
- The working group recognise there is a need to improve communication with researchers, across research institutes and sections, and facilitate multi- and inter-disciplinary discussions and researcher development. An annual research calendar is also being considered and developed.
- For research institutes/research operations to consider how to support improvement in PDR satisfaction in 2025 PDR round, through consideration of how best to support reviewers and reviewees to have better PDR conversations and engage in more continuous feedback around employees' work, development needs and career planning.
- Research Culture Strategy actions for 2024/25 and current objectives are to raise awareness of research culture as a focus of excellence for our work at the merged university; deepen our understanding of issues around research culture; build a research culture that is recognised as excellent both internally and externally. To do this the Research Culture working group are pursuing four main themes, *Building connections* [through engagement], *Breaking barriers* [through support], *Influencing widely* [impact and value] and *Embedding values* [through management]. We will continue to raise awareness of research culture through our direct consultations with stakeholders, by expansion of activity on the Research Culture Hub, the completion of actions on our action plan and by supporting the activity of other research/researcher focussed working groups and sharing best practice. Our short-term aims will rotate by theme. 2024-25 will focus on Building Connections by helping our community better network on the Tooting campus, with the wider University and with other research staff at HE institutions (PROSPER). We will continue to pursue mid-term aims such as the expansion of the ERA programme and long-term aims such as making the City St George's, Tooting campus more accessible to researchers with disabilities.
- The BRF will be developing a public engagement strategy to showcase the University's commitment to ethical research and transparency, contributing to a more positive research and student experience.

Employment

- Continued analysis of academic promotions data to look at trends and improving BAME* representation in applications, retaining 50% or above in 2024/25 and success in securing promotion >33% in the next promotion round 2024/25.
- Continued review of fixed-term contracts to reduce the proportion of research assistants and fellows who are on fixed-term contracts, as compared to permanent contracts in 2024/25 (85% in 2023/24).
- Support career planning to aid future employability/progression, i.e. processes for when nearing end of contract and exit interviews. With the aim of making short term employment better managed.

Professional and Career Development

- Improve the offer of specialist careers advice for researchers, to support them developing their career plans and maintaining a record of continued career development. Success will be measured through staff feedback and PDR satisfaction in CEDARS and staff surveys.
- Support the development of specific career development reviews with managers and supervisors to better support ECR career conversations and planning. Success will be measured through staff feedback, including via CEDARS.
- Rejuvenate the PhD/Postdoc mentoring scheme and engage more of those at Senior Lecturer, Reader and Professor roles to become internal mentors. Simplify the PhD/Postdoc mentoring offer to enable PhD/Postdocs to self-select mentors and set up partnerships to meet their needs. Success will be measured through increased mentoring partnerships and staff feedback, including via CEDARS. The aim is to set up a task and finish group take this work forward.
- Building on the visibility of the research ethics and integrity areas across the university. The aim will be to engage in more university wide events and collaborate with the research culture leads. This will allow research integrity and ethics leads to reach more ECRs and highlight the tools and resources that are available to the researchers. The team are aiming to procure a certified research integrity training course that will be available to researchers of all levels.
- Continue to raise awareness of the *Concordat to Support the Career development of Researchers* and highlight the opportunities for development that Vitae offer for our research staff to pursue personal CPD in relation to their professional and career development needs.

* We would like to acknowledge that the term "BAME" (Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic) is not universally considered inclusive, as it tends to group together diverse ethnicities with unique identities and experiences. However, it is important to clarify that our use of the term "BAME" in this context is in alignment with the terminology employed by the UK government for the sake of consistency. We recognise and respect the ongoing discussions surrounding inclusive language and encourage active dialogue to ensure our communication is reflective of diverse perspectives.