

HR Excellence in Research: University of St Andrews 10 Year Internal Review Report



This summary report provides the institutional context for the HR in Excellence in Research (HREiR) award and is submitted with a [backward action plan](#), and a copy of the institutional HREiR [forward action plan](#). These three documents will be published externally as part of our signatory responsibilities, in line with our 10-year Award submission (cohort 7).

The University of St Andrews has successfully retained the HREiR Award through each internal and external review process since it was first received from the European Commission in 2012, reflecting the University's commitment to supporting researcher development. An extension to the deadline for our submission for the 10-year HREiR award was granted for a new deadline of 27th January 2023, bringing us in line with our Researcher Development Concordat (RDC) annual report submission, evidencing of our RDC responsibilities.

This document, alongside the HREiR action plans, has been submitted to the RDC senior manager champion, Professor Tom Brown (Vice Principal Research, Collections, and Innovation), chair of Research, Impact, and Innovation Committee (RIIC), the University's Governing Body for the RDC. These documents were previously submitted as part of an interim progress report, which was submitted to RIIC and UUK in May 2022, and can be viewed via the [St Andrews RDC](#) webpage.

Institutional context

The [University of St Andrews](#), a Scottish university with a global presence, is a modern institution with an ancient history, combining traditional and contemporary values. Drawn from over 140 countries, our diverse community of staff and students enables us to take a global perspective, as we aim to achieve excellence and leadership in research, teaching, and the pursuit of knowledge for cultural and societal greater good. Our balance of teaching and research commitments, available support, and development opportunities, creates an attractive environment conducive to world-changing research undertaken by world-leading researchers.

Academic subjects are organised across 19 schools within 4 faculties: Arts, Divinity, Science, and Medicine. We value curiosity-led research and scholarship, and our size and structure promote working across traditional disciplines. We make significant contributions to national and global priorities including the blue economy, advanced materials, health, the digital economy, sustainable development and (inter) governmental policy.

Since 2014, the University has invested extensively in its estate (over £100m) and is committed through 2029 to triple this contribution including a new combined site for social sciences and growing the enterprise activity portfolios at our Eden Campus (5 miles West of St Andrews) including facilities for technicians.

Our [University Strategy 2023-27](#) expresses our ambitions for teaching and research across five themes: World-leading, Diverse, Digital, Sustainable, and Entrepreneurial; explicitly placing all the University's work within the context of Social Responsibility.

Research Governance

University staff hold key leadership roles within the wider higher education and research communities, including the Convenor for Universities Scotland and the Chief Scientist (Health) for the Scottish Government. Staff members also sit on the boards of UUK and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee. Amongst our academics, we have the Executive Chair of the AHRC, members of the EPSRC (Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council) Strategic Advisory Network, the former Chief Scientific Adviser for DEFRA, and members of both the Science Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and the Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group.

We contribute to the Scottish and UK university sectors through Universities Scotland and UUK and have helped raise the international profile of research across Scottish HEIs through the SFC strategy of research pooling. We participate in 9 of the 11 Scottish research pools, co-founded the Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance and host the Universal Short Title Catalogue (USTC). Our long-standing Chemistry research partnership with the University of Edinburgh, EaStChem, underpinned our joint submission to REF 2021.

Institutional research and impact strategy is set by the Office of the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, within the remit of the Vice Principal (Research, Collections, and Innovation) who also has oversight for the University library, and physical and digital collections. The Assistant Vice-Principal (Provost) has responsibility for the postgraduate community. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policy and implementation is overseen by the Vice-Principal People and Diversity.

[St Andrews' Research Excellence Framework \(REF\) 2021 Results](#) indicate our research success quality and output and more than 88% of research carried out by the University of St Andrews is world-leading or internationally excellent. The overall quality of research at St Andrews has also increased by 5.7% since REF 2014.

The University has a community of approximately 2,000 researchers, split evenly between the post-graduate and post-doctoral levels, across our four academic disciplines (Arts & Divinity (38%), Medicine (7%), and Sciences (56%) with a few in our professional service units (less than 1%). The University's academic staff have a clearly defined [academic job family](#) and comprise 672 on Research and Education contracts, 366 on Research-only contracts, and 190 staff on Education-focused contracts.

The University hosts innovative researchers from around the world (45% of post-doctoral researchers, and 57% of post-graduate researchers (PGRs), are non-UK nationals) to conduct their pioneering research, making a major contribution to the University's position as one of the world's leading research-intensive institutions.

In 2021, 45% of our fixed-term post-doctoral researchers identified as women and 55% as men. For PGRs, 48% identified as women and 52% as men. While we acknowledge that there are researchers that identify outwith these genders, we have insufficient data to report on this population. Amongst researchers who are UK nationals, 87% identified as White, 6% as Black or Minority Ethnic (BME), with 7% of undeclared ethnicity. For researchers who are non-UK nationals, 67% identified as White, 24% as BME and 9% undeclared.

'Diverse St Andrews' is one of our [5 updated strategic themes](#) and ensures inclusivity is central to all policy and practice developments, and outlines our commitment to closing participation, attainment, retention, progress, and experience gaps across key socio-demographic characteristics.

The University holds a Bronze Athena Swan award, with all 19 schools holding a bronze, silver or gold award in recognition of our record of activity and achievement in promoting, addressing, and developing gender equality within the institution. The University is currently undertaking internal self-assessment in preparation for submission for a Silver Institutional Athena Swan award in July 2023.

The University is also a bearer of an LGBT Charter, accredited by LGBT Youth Scotland, for the University's work in being an inclusive institution. The University is undertaking extensive work to develop a comprehensive baseline for the institution with regards to its activities, achievements, and shortcomings regarding race and ethnicity, in preparation for submission of the Race Equality Charter application to Advance HE.

The primary target audience for the RDC is the University's academic staff, which comprises 672 on Research and Teaching contracts, 366 on Research-only contracts. A full list of RDC stakeholders is provided in the HREiR 10 year Report Supporting Document.

Achievements from our 2020-2022 [Backward Action Plan](#)

Evaluation and consultation

The internal review was undertaken between October 2020 and October 2022 by the University HR (Human Resources) Excellence [Working Group](#), which includes Research Staff (RS) and PGR representatives working alongside representatives from [Organisational & Staff Development Services](#) (OSDS) and the [Centre for Educational Enhancement and Development](#) (CEED), HR, [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion](#) (EDI), [Careers Centre](#) and [Research and Innovation Services](#) (RIS). Many HR Excellence Working Group members also sit on other working groups (e.g., Athena Swan, Wellbeing & Engagement, Equality Compliance, Research Integrity, Research Committee).

The Working Group obtained feedback from the research community through:

- The regular Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey ([CEDARS](#)) including longitudinal analysis from past [CROS](#) and [PIRLS](#)
- An independent [Research Culture Review](#) - autumn 2021
- [Staff Opinion Survey Results](#) - Published June 2022
- Other relevant action plans and surveys e.g. [People Enabling Strategy \(2019-2023\)](#), Mental Health Staff Forums, Local Induction Surveys and data from our Personal Development Management System (PDMS)
- Regular [Research Staff Forums](#) (RSF) and School RSF Representatives input ensures effective communication across the research space.

These activities have informed the development of the institution's new RDC Gap Analysis, the associated HREiR award forward strategy and Action Plan, and provided direction to meet the needs of the research community's career development through the Human Resources and Organisational Development Enhancement Project (HRODEP). The HRODEP seeks to enhance the experience of all University employees across the entire employment experience. The project includes work to develop the recruitment and induction experience, career development and progression support, and a competency-based development framework for employees that will link behavioural attributes to the current Researcher Development Framework (RDF).

Achievements

The response to the Covid pandemic commencing in March 2020, highlighted the flexibility of remote working, digital development, and engagement activities. The pandemic impacted on the achievements of the action plan especially regarding in-person development events (see backward action plan). There continued to be an impact on 'business as usual' until late 2022 when staff were finally able to make a phased return to physical workspaces.

The majority of development activities were adapted and moved to online delivery from March 2020 until late 2022 including:

- A full interim programme of CPD for RS
- Mentoring provision via the Teaching, Research and Academic Mentoring Scheme (TRAMS)
- The Passport to Research Futures (PRF) programme (ILM recognised)
- The Public Engagement Portfolio (PEP)
- Writing retreats
- Research Staff Forum meetings and associated activities

An ambitious attendance target was set for CPD activities but understandably, attendance at events was lower than expected over the review period, with the pandemic at its height over Academic Year 20/21. Lower than average engagement continued into 2022 for online and in-person events, with attendance often sitting at 30-45% (source PDMS). Satisfaction indicator ratings (SIR) however, remained high (between 75-85%) while engagement with post-activity evaluation dropped (<20-50%). There were 13 PRF certificates awarded during the review period.

TRAMS supported 147 partnerships (6 institutions) for the 2020-21 partnership cycle, 160 (7 institutions) for 2021-22 and 176 for 2022-23, and >85 % participants surveyed reported receiving a good match. [Online CPD](#) and [online resources](#) continue to support the remote mentoring process.

There were achievements with respect to careers support and skills training for RS coming to the end of their contracts with priority Careers Adviser appointments provided. There was still opportunity to develop internal mobility into professional and academic career paths, achieved through the linking of job families with a university-wide behavioural competency framework. Mapped to Vitae's RDF, it highlights transferable skills significant in other job families.

Induction for all staff and local induction for RS moved online 2020-22. Local induction returned to in-person later in 2022. The first in-person, all staff induction event in almost 3 years, took place in February 2023, allowing RS once again, the opportunity to meet academics and professional services staff from across the university.

Several other mechanisms including substantial support for furloughed RS, information bulletin, web pages and support services around Covid were put in place. The importance of well-being initiatives were delivered for all university staff, and while this includes RS, the specific number participating was not measured.

There is a wide range of development activities in place, however some have greater value for RS than others, and there is opportunity to be more rigorous in both the collation of data and methods of evaluation to evidence the impact of these.

Strategy and Focus for our 2023-2025 [Forward Action Plan](#)

A thorough and consultative approach has been taken to consider the gaps in our provision for RS including the independent research culture survey, and a recent consultation and review of the refreshed university strategy for 2022-27. The forward action plan is linked into the people plan and institutional diversity strategic theme with progress reporting to the VP of People and Diversity.

Evidence of progress/improvements will be measured and monitored in the forward action plan 2023-2025 by assessing views and perception of staff, collected through the Culture, Employment, and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS 2023). This will allow comparisons of previous years, quarterly reporting on attendance and satisfaction statistics, and RS feedback to working groups and RS representatives and forums.

Our forward action plan will focus on **4 key development projects** to address environment and culture, employment, and professional and career development.

Communications – targeted communications and initiatives to support an environment and open and inclusive research culture through:

- Increased awareness of the concordat measured through staff surveys
- Promotion of staff / manager development 1-1s through improved monitoring and collation of development needs for RS
- Promotion of individual development plans that will meet the 10 days of development and include opportunities for on-the-job, off-the-job, and near-the-job actions with reflective practice and links to career trajectory and alternative pathways
- Consult and agree with researchers and managers / supervisors on what should count towards 'development,' and progress alongside senior management, regarding time and resource allocation for this provision

PI and line manager training – We completed significant work around wellbeing activities and events but are now looking to invest in preventative strategies and approach and achieve this through line management best practices and maintain high standards of research integrity. This will be measured through line manager confidence, less recourse actions against managers and increased RS satisfaction and engagement scores.

Career Pathways - made obvious through the implementation of University wide competency behavioural frameworks that tie HERA (Higher Education Role Analysis) (grading competencies) to Vitae's RDF, enhancing career mobility across job families and organisation.

Recruitment and Induction – Improved and transparent recruitment processes with competency-based interviews for Researcher roles and closer evaluation of in-post induction process at school level.

We intend to employ outcome-based success measures of the above objectives that will provide the university with a solid evidence base to move RS support to the next level in the next three years.