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

This summary final report provides the institutional context for submission 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 HR Excellence in Research Award submission (cohort 7), following formal acknowledgement on achieving the Award.

The University of St Andrews has successfully retained the HR Excellence in Research 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 HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) award was granted for a new deadline of 27th January 2023 bringing us in line with our Concordat annual submission and this report's evidencing of our Concordat responsibilities.

This document represents the final report which, alongside the HREiR action plans, has been submitted to the Research Development Concordat (RDC) senior manager champion, Professor Tom Brown (Vice Principal Research, Collections, and Innovation), chair of Research, Impact, and Innovation Committee (RIIC), and the University's Governing Body for the RDC. These documents were previously submitted as part of a second interim report, which was submitted to RIIC and UUK in May 2022, and can be viewed via the St Andrews Concordat 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 four 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 (Scottish Funding Council) strategy of research pooling. We participate in 9 of the 11 Scottish research pools, co-founded the Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance, based at the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and host the Universal Short Title Catalogue (USTC). Our long-standing Chemistry research partnership with the University of Edinburgh, EaStChem, underpins 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 of St Andrews 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 academics from around the world (45% of post-doctoral researchers, and 57% of post-graduate researchers, 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 post-graduate researchers, 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 target audience for concordat is the University’s academic staff, which comprises 672 on Research and Teaching contracts, 366 on Research-only contracts.

**Achievements from our 2020-2022 Backward Action Plan**

**Evaluation and consultation**

The University has undertaken work in obtaining feedback from the research community through:

- the regular Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) including longitudinal analysis from past CROS and PIRL
- 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 and School Research Staff Representatives

These activities have informed the development of the institution’s Researcher Development Concordat (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 current Researcher Development Framework (RDF).

The internal review was undertaken between October 2020 and October 2022 by the University HR (Human Resources) Excellence Working Group, including research staff (RS) and postgraduate research representatives working alongside representatives from Organisational and Staff Development Services (OSDS) and the Centre for Educational Enhancement and Development (CEED), HR, EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion), Careers Centre and 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). Input from the Research Staff Forum (RSF) ensures effective communication across the research space.
Achievements

The response to the Covid pandemic 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’ right up until late 2022 when staff were finally able to return to physical spaces.

Nearly all of the development activities were moved over to on-line delivery including: a full interim programme of CPD for researcher, mentoring and coaching matching via Teaching, Research and Academic Mentoring Scheme (TRAMS), a full schedule of Passport to Research Futures (PRF) programme (ILM level 7 accredited), the PEP programme and writing retreats all delivered online and this has continued into 2022, Research Staff Forums also moved on-line although these returned to in-person at the end of 2022.

An ambitious attendance target was set however attendance at events was lower than expected. This was understandable during 20-21 with the pandemic at its height, however low engagement has continued into 2022 for both online and in-person events and meeting with attendance often sitting between 30-45% (source PDMS). Satisfaction indicators (SIR) remain high (between 75-85%) the number of staff responding to event evaluations are low (under 20-50%). There have been no ILM level 7 PRF awards for the last 3 years.

There were achievements in respect to career advice, support and skills training for Researchers coming to the end of their contracts with priority given to them for Career Adviser appointments. 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 across to the existing Vitae RDF it highlights transferable skills significant in other job families.

Induction for all staff and local induction for research staff moved online. Local induction returned to in-person and onsite later in 2022 where it was safe to do so. An in-person, all staff induction, where research staff can meet academics and personal services staff from across the university was agreed at the end of 2022. The first in-person event for almost 3 years is scheduled for February 2023.

Several other mechanisms including substantial support for furloughed research staff, 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 research staff, the specific number participating was not measured.

There is a wide range of development activities 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 research staff 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 March 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 RF 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 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.
Appendix 1: The review Process

The review process consisted of 4 principal processes:

1. 6–8-week review meetings were used to monitor progress against the 2020-2022 action plan and to review the plan itself, ensuring that: Actions recorded progress, marked as complete, rewritten, or removed and new actions added.
2. Surveying relevant cohorts (see feedback mechanisms above) to validate extant actions, provide evidence of progress and generate new actions.
3. Regular Consultation with RS via the RSF (including RS Reps, managers of RS and VP Research, Collections & Innovation), regular networking events, ‘fast focus groups and newsletters.
4. Gaining approval and commitment from the Principal’s Office, who have endorsed the 2020-2022 Action Plan ensuring its alignment with the University Strategy 2018-2023 & People Enabling Strategy.

All past iterations of action plans are published on our HR Excellence webpage, along with a glossary of terms.

The Gap Analysis was carried out against each of the Institutional Commitments outlined in the Concordat. The first draft of the gap analysis was reviewed by the HR Excellence Working Group on 7th December 2021. New and Ongoing Objectives (2020-22) from the HREiR 8 year Review are being aligned with the new RDC principles where applicable and transferred across to the new HREiR action plan template circulated on 8th April 2022. New actions identified through the gap analysis process are also being transferred across.

To reduce repetition, the draft gap analysis continues to be used to identify where actions should be actively progressed, by the HR Excellence Working Group or the University Research Culture Group depending on group remit, relevance, and expertise. The latter are working to coordinate and co-develop cultural change between the University’s research community, professional services community, and senior management. Many actions (ongoing and new) also align with the Institution’s 2023 Athena Swan Silver award submission process and may be progressed via the associated Working Groups.

All current Research Staff and all current Line Managers of Research Staff (both groups defined as stakeholders by the Concordat) and other relevant stakeholders / groups (see Annex A) including RIIC members were given the opportunity to feed into the gap analysis agreed by the HR Excellence Working Group via the Research Staff Forum, discussion groups and by email, before the final forward action plan is submitted to RIIC for approval.

In January 2022, as part of the consultation process, all Research Staff Forum representatives (from 11 academic Schools) and all Research Staff were invited to participate in ‘Research Staff Forum Concordat Discussions’ which focused on mental health and wellbeing, and job security. A small but engaged group of researchers attended and worked alongside VP Research & Innovation and representatives from those areas of the University who support researchers (e.g. Human Resources [HR], Equality, Diversity and Inclusion [EDI], Organisational & Staff Development Services [OSDS], Centre for Educational Enhancement and Development [CEED] and University and College Union (UCU), to inform the Gap analysis
and generate ideas for actions around wellbeing and mental health (RDC theme 2), and job security (RDC theme 11).

The plan is to continue with more such sessions with relevant stakeholders in the near future, and over the next three years, with a view to reviewing current provision and developing potential actions around the 16 themes which run through the RDC. In consultation with RSF, RS Reps and the working group a priority list of themes was agreed. The four areas of priority were: communication and awareness, PI and Line manager development, universal competencies frameworks and recruitment and induction.
Appendix 2: University Governance

The main University bodies influencing our research culture, policy and practice are:

- University Court (overall governing body)
- Senate (providing academic governance and oversight)
- Research Excellence Board (support to schools and wider University)
- Research, Impact, and Innovation Committee (RIIC) (including School Directors of Research & Directors of Impact, support services and faculty EDI leads)
- Research Staff Forum (representation for postdoctoral researchers)
- Technician Engagement Group
- Postgraduate Research Committee

The research environment of academic schools is sustained and supported by 27 Professional Service units. For research, impact and innovation strategy, support has a coherent core within the remit of Research and Innovation Services (RIS), including research integrity, ethics, and governance; research information systems and policy; research impact; innovation, technology transfer and commercialisation; and open research.
Appendix 3: Stakeholders and communications

**Key stakeholders and other relevant groups** that will directly benefit from and/or contribute to the institutional embedding of the RDC and the HREiR Award process, which continues to ensure that actions are progressed in alignment with the principles of the RDC.